

“JOE, THIS POOR MURDERED WOMAN LYING HERE WAS YOUR MOTHER.”

—Slender Clue, p. 352.



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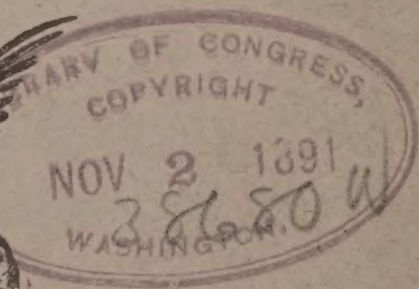
# A SLENDER CLUE

BY

LAWRENCE L. LYNCH

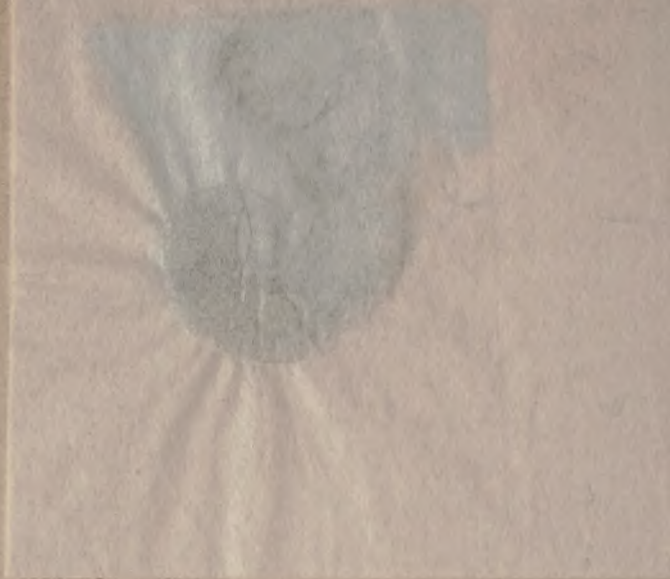
Author of "Moina; or Against the Mighty," "Shadowed by Three,"  
"The Lost Witness," "Madeline Payne," &c.

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# A SLENDER CLUE

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## CHAPTER I

### A PRISON EXODUS

At eight o'clock in the morning of a certain bright spring day there is more than the usual stir and interested activity within the walls of a certain state's penitentiary.

Two carriages wait at its gates. One is plain but elegant, with its driver in sober livery sitting erect upon its box, and eying superciliously the other vehicle, a showy coupe, and its driver in his dashing trappings which, as he very well knows, are not like his own, the emblems of aristocracy, but merely the trade mark of an up-town livery stable.

Within the prison two inmates of nearly opposite cells are transforming themselves into denizens of the outer world—sloughing off their horizontal stripes, and donning in their stead, garments fresh from the hands of the tailor.

"As sure as I'm a ticket-of-leave-man," says "Number 43," holding up between two big brown hands, a coat of unexceptionable cut and make. "My friends are beginning to appreciate me! I'll swear nobody ever yet saw me in such bang-up togs as these—at least not for some time. Well—there's more than one way of bringing your merits before the people. Let's get into 'em, Cap. I'm dying to know how I'll look."



"Number 43" is a tall, muscular fellow of, possibly, thirty or thirty-four years, with strongly knit frame, broad shoulders, full chest and a careless swinging gait. His hands are large, firm, and shapely; his head well developed and carried with a careless independence in perfect accord with his manner and gait. His features are firm, almost to ruggedness, and yet, with his big, brown eyes, bright, observant and full of humor, his splendid frame and his general air of *bonhomie*, he would be set down anywhere as a good-looking fellow. As he buttons his coat about him, fits a soft-hat over his thick, close-cropped, brown hair, and turns toward the guard with an off-hand gesture and the humorous look in his big, bright eyes, one would be likely to call him a clever fellow as well.

"How *do* I look?" he demands, giving the hat a pull over his right ear. "Honest, and interesting, and innocent? That's it, that's how I *want* to look. Wouldn't think I'd just come out of this old jug if you met me strolling through the park, would you? Well by-bye; take a good look at me, it isn't at all likely that I shall find time to pay you another visit. Don't weep; give this chess suit," kicking the prison garments from before him, "and my blessing to my successor. Wonder which he will appreciate most, eh? Well, lead on, Macduff."

While "No. 43" is thus making merry, and turning jauntily toward his newly acquired liberty, "No. 46," in grave silence is also preparing to face the outside world. He is a fair-haired man, with pale regular features, dark blue eyes, and small aristocratic hands and feet. His movements are slow, and the glance which he casts upon each garment, as he silently dons it, is disparagingly critical. He has no jest for the guard in waiting, no word, in fact; and, as he takes up the hat



provided for him and silently assures himself that it is not a misfit, there is no hilarity in the action, no haste, no undignified desire to be assured that he looks "Honest, and interesting, and innocent."

Nevertheless he looks wonderfully well, and not at all like a criminal. Genteel, intellectual, aristocratic—these are the words that would best apply to him; a trifle haughty, too, as with hat in hand, he signifies by a gesture his readiness to leave his late habitation.

Outside of those bare walls he might be taken for a student, a theologian—even a poet.

"No. 43," whose movements have kept time with his flippant tongue, is the first to appear in the warden's office, where three anxious faces are instantly lifted to greet him, while the warden rises from his desk and favors him with a broad smile.

"So," begins the late prisoner with a short laugh. "you've had enough of my society, Mr. Warden! You mean to turn me out?"

"Oh *I'm* willing to keep you," retorts Warden Crofts. "But these gentlemen," nodding toward the group near him, "*they* want you outside."

"No. 43" turns quickly, and meets the gaze of the three eager faces with a start and a frown, that ends in a smile, as he advances and extends his hand.

"Ah, Mr. Morton," he says, "I'm glad to see you;" and then his keen eyes rest inquiringly upon the other two faces.

"My lawyers, *our* lawyers, Mr. Carnes," says Mr. Morton in answer to the look of inquiry, and still shaking the hand of the ex-prisoner, "you know them?"

"By reputation, *very* well," and he turns toward the legal gentlemen who rise to take his hand.

"Are you ready to accompany us?" asks Mr. Morton anxiously.



"I think so."

"One moment, gentlemen," interposes the warden, "all the necessary forms have been complied with, but—there is another pris—person who goes out at this hour, if Mr. Carnes—"

"No. 43" laughs good-humoredly and lounges back against the warden's desk.

"Mr. Carnes will wait for his fellow prisoner," he says; "we will go out into the free air, supported by each other. Thanks for the suggestion, Crofts, you know my objection to prison favors. Who's the other fellow?"

"No. 46."

"No. 46!" Carnes arches his eyebrows and whistles a low note of astonishment. "'46'! why I've walked with my hands on his shoulders this many a day. Fine shoulders they are, too. Barrin' a trifle too much slope they were just my fit. What has '46' been doing time for?"

"Oh, the genteel business; trifling with notes and bank drafts. He's a dabster with a pen."

"Of course—of course! He's fine cut from head to foot, is '46'! Nothing common about *him*. I shall be proud to make my exit in such good society."

He closes his lips suddenly, and turns his face toward the door. "No. 46" is entering there with the graceful composure of a man who has passed the last ten years of his life in making morning calls.

Without so much as a glance at the other occupants of the room he advances toward the warden.

"Has my carriage arrived," he asks serenely.

The warden glances over his shoulder to the attendant in the doorway.

"The carriage for '46'," he says crisply.

"It is here, sir."

As "No. 46" turns with an upward motion of the hand holding the glossy hat, his late fellow-prisoner starts

forward with an ejaculation both sudden and profane.

"'46'! Why I say! '46,' I'm blessed if I knew you! Zounds man, what would I give for such a complete metamorphose! *Blessed*, if I knew you! and we're going out together, you and I! That's good, too! Right, left, we might take the old step. Don't you think you will feel more natural if we start out in that way? Right left," and he laughs jovially and goes through the pantomime of the prison march, advancing toward '46,' as if to rest his hands upon the sloping, aristocratic shoulders.

But "'46" draws back haughtily, and favors his late comrade with an icy glance.

"I have not," he says in slow, liquid tones, "nor do I desire, the honor of your acquaintance, sir."

His tormentor stops his pantomime, to stagger back with a dramatic gesture, then turns away with a mocking laugh.

"I'm afraid he won't get on without me," he whispers to the warden in a stage aside, and that official smiles and turns toward the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ten minutes later and Mr. Morton, the two lawyers and the facetious Mr. Carnes are whirling along a smooth road, leading cityward, seated comfortably in the plain but elegant carriage which is the private property of Mr. Morton; while, not far behind, the dashing coupe and its liveried driver followed, with "No. 46," calm, grave, aristocratic, as its sole occupant.

When they are some distance away from the prison, "46" leans forward and addresses his driver:

"Coachman, is there another way of reaching the city, without too much travel?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then leave that carriage ahead, at the first opportunity, and take another route."



"Yes, sir."

A few moments later, the man Carnes interrupts the conversation going on within Mr. Morton's private carriage, to thrust his head out of a window and look back. The coupe is just disappearing down a cross-road.

"Oh!" he ejaculates, drawing in his head with a jerk, "'46' declines to follow."

"You seem uncommonly interested in that gentleman," comments one of the lawyers, glancing sharply at him.

"Yes, rather," he replies carelessly. "Probably you observed that the interest is not mutual?"

The lawyer favors him with another keen glance.

"I suppose you understand why it is so one-sided?" he hazards.

"Nothing of the sort, unless I set it down as instinct. I never saw 'No. 46' until I saw him in prison; I don't even know his name, or the name he chooses to carry. I may never see him again, but—I can tell his fortune."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. That man will begin where he left off. He can't keep out of mischief; and some day—he will feel, if not my hand, at least one as heavy, upon his shoulder again."

And with another pantomimic suggestion of the prison tread, he turns his face toward Mr. Morton, and then checks himself, suddenly dropping his whimsical manner and leaning toward that gentleman, to say in a lower tone:

"I see your anxiety in your face, sir. But this is not the place for disclosures. I have not been unsuccessful; the rest must wait until we have reached the privacy of your own library."

And Rufus Carnes, the skilled detective who for months has worn a felon's garb, and lived a felon's life, that he might be brought into daily contact with a prisoner whose

secrets it was important that he should know, leans back among the carriage cushions, and looks serenely out upon the fleeting panorama of field and pasture, while Mr. Morton, the man in whose behalf he has made himself a prisoner, fastens two eager eyes upon his face, and wishes the drive at an end.

"I wonder," says Carnes, suddenly bending forward and looking from one face to the other, "if any of you smoke; because if you do, and if you have a cigar—"

One of the legal gentlemen promptly produces a well-filled cigar-case.

"Any objections?" Carnes asks this question while helping himself to a fine "Havana," and no objection being raised he lights it and puffs away in silence for a time. Then, taking the weed from between his lips, he breaths a huge sigh of satisfaction and says: "A good cigar is one of the very few things that a man can't live without, and live contentedly. I never knew it before. It fills a nameless longing that I have felt for the past three months. I wonder if my elegant neighbor, 'No. 46', can appreciate a good cigar?"

If one might judge the thoughts of "No. 46" by the expression of his face as he bowls along the by-way taken by his obliging, and well-informed driver, he is not thinking of a cigar; nor is his soul troubled by any "nameless longing," as he leans back upon the cushions of the coupe, closing his eyes in dreamy meditation, enjoying to the full the luxurious sway of the light-rolling vehicle, the freshness of the morning air, the chirping of robins, the odor of freshly tilled earth, the budding, growing, greenness of a sunny April day.

On leaving the highway he has lowered the windows of the coupe and now, after ten minutes of silent enjoyment, he leans out and addresses the driver.



"When does the first train leave for Chicago?" he asks slowly.

"Two fifteen, sir," the man replies without turning his head.

"Ah! you have the time?"

The driver consults a shabby, silver time-piece.

"Ten thirty-seven, sir," he says promptly; then chir-rups to his horses.

"Thank you! There is no need of haste—drive slowly please."

The horses are reined to a slower pace, and as "Number 46" gazes about him, first on one side then on the other, he murmurs half-aloud:

"Ah, nature! even thy everyday face is beautiful to the man who for nearly ten years has seen only bare walls, and smoke-obscured sky. Ten lost years! Ten stolen years that, in some form, I must wrest back from the hand of Fate!"

He sighs softly, then smiles, as his observant eye notes a pretty contest between two robins, that wrestle vigorously for the possession of a worm, by the road-side.

It is nearly noon when the coupe draws up before the door of a flourishing banking house, and its occupant slowly descends, and, bidding his driver wait, walks up the steps and in through the heavy swinging door.

Someone is at the cashier's window, and he leans against the desk nearest at hand, and flecks a few particles of dust from his coat sleeve while he waits, scarcely glancing to right or left, although ten years change has been wrought about him.

As the person before him leaves the window, "No. 46" moves forward and drawing to him one of the blanks lying upon the narrow desk, writes a name upon it in a graceful, careless hand, and pushing it toward the cashier, says:

"You have received my notification no doubt?"

The cashier favors him with a sharp, swift glance, then drops his eyes to the signature upon the blank check before him, lifting them again to bestow upon the author a second look, full of mingled interest and curiosity, and so long, that "No. 46" who is indifferently scanning a unique calendar just before him, makes a restless movement and meets his eyes with a look of haughty inquiry.

With the shadow of a smile crossing his face, the cashier turns to his books and "No. 46" resumes his scrutiny of the calendar, with calm, unruffled countenance.

There is a brief consultation behind the desk of the cashier and that functionary appears again at the window.

"You wish a full statement, Mr. Poinsett?" he says, courteously.

"Yes."

"It is ready."

Mr. Poinsett takes the slip of paper that comes sliding across the desk, glances at it carelessly, and says:

"Yes? No doubt it is correct. I stated that I would draw my balance to-day."

"It is ready. Ten thousand, two hundred and sixty dollars."

"Ten thousand in a draft upon Chicago, please. The rest in cash."

It is done. Oh the potency of a bank-cashier! the genie of our nineteenth century! "Number 46," late the ticket-of-leave man, re-enters his coupe, "No. 46" no longer.

Rechristened, rehabilitated, by the genie of the age—*Mr. Poinsett*, with a purse and a pedigree.



## CHAPTER II

### IN WHICH CARNES RECEIVES A "MEDIUM"

Mr. Morton, the anxious patron of the detective Rufus Carnes, lived in a suburban town, a morning's drive from Chicago, and it was to his fine residence that his party drove after leaving the penitentiary and its precincts.

Rufus Carnes had been employed to investigate a case of bank burglary and the course of his investigations had landed him for a longer time than he found enjoyable, within the walls of the penitentiary. His time however had not been given to the State in vain; and he had emerged holding in his hands the clues which promised to bring the mystery surrounding the robbery, to a speedy conclusion and *expose*.

He remained all night under the roof of his patron, and sat until a very late hour in consultation with the two lawyers; and when, on the following morning, he stepped on board a train going cityward, he heaved a sigh of relief, shook the burden of business from his shoulders, lighted a prime cigar and settled down to a comfortable perusal of the morning papers.

He smoked and read in placid content until the train steamed into the city station, and then he stepped briskly through the crowd like a man who knows his way and sees nothing strange, walking hurriedly through the station and out upon the street. But not unobserved, for a young man with a slovenly gait, and wearing the dress of a laborer, who had been languidly watching the unloading of a quantity of baggage, seemed startled into

new activity as the hurrying form crossed his line of vision, and when Carnes emerged from the crowd, the laborer was close at his heels.

When he stepped across the pavement and addressed a hackman, who ceased his bawling to listen, the laborer was near enough to hear him say:

"Drive ahead about two blocks and wait for me; I'll be with you in three minutes." Then he turned and re-entered the station.

"He's going to send a telegram," muttered the laborer, noting the direction taken by Carnes. "I—see."

He turned abruptly, crossed the street to where an express wagon stood, and addressed its driver:

"Hallo Charlie! are you up to anything?"

"Nothing important; want me?"

"Yes; you see that carriage just turning out there?"

"Yes, I see it."

"I want you to follow it, that's all," and he stepped nimbly over the wheel and seated himself beside the driver.

"Wait till you see a man come out from the door next the telegraph office," he said hurriedly, "a big fellow with a swing to his gait, smooth face, gray clothes. He will get into that carriage a block or two down. See where he stops; he will go to a hotel or lodgings—then come back and tell me. I must get back to my baggage."

He leaped to the ground and crossed the street just as Carnes reappeared from the station and went rapidly toward the waiting hack.

An hour later Rufus Carnes was seated before a comfortable fire in his room in a snug but unfashionable hotel, smoking tranquilly, and bending forward at intervals to add a touch to something outlined in pencil upon a sheet of paper that lay upon the table before him, when



there came a hesitating tap upon his door which he answered with a prompt and cheery "Come in."

But a change marred the serenity of his countenance when his eyes rested upon the person who entered with hesitating steps and a series of bows.

"Umph!" ejaculated Carnes, and then as the stranger closed the door cautiously, he leaned back in his chair and surveyed him at length.

"Well!" he finally exclaimed as after a moment of hesitation his visitor began a silent slow approach. "An' fwhat the divel do *you* want?"

The stranger, a seedy-looking man, wearing his hair in long straggling locks and his whiskers to match, lifted one hand, encased in a tattered glove, caressed the straggling whiskers and tilted the glasses that rested too low upon his nose.

"My name," he began in a melancholy tone, "is Ebenezer Bates."

"Nate name," commented Mr. Carnes.

"I'm a Medium," pursued Mr. Bates with an accession of dignity.

"Yes, a Mejium!" Mr. Carnes came slowly to his feet. "So'm I a Mejium, Mither Bates. Did ye come to 'ave yer fortune towld?"

"You scoff," sighed Mr. Ebenezer Bates. "You doubt me," and he laid his hat softly, tenderly upon the table. "Listen: I come to ask a favor."

"Oh! did yee's?" Mr. Carnes grew emphatic and his suddenly acquired dialect became broader.

"My friend," Mr. Bates lowered his voice to a mysterious whisper—"you have just regained your liberty."

"What!" Carnes made a hasty stride forward.

"Yesterday you were a convict." Mr. Bates retreated as far as his host had advanced.

Carnes became suddenly calm and stood quite still.

"You were known in prison as 'No 43'."

A sudden fire leaped into the eyes of the detective, his lips met, forming a straight line. With one stride he had reached the door and stood with his back against it.

"My friend!" he said sternly, "ye've made a few remarks for yer own divarsion, *now* ye may do a little spache-makin' fer moine."

"As much as you like, sir;" the visitor seated himself coolly in his host's lately vacated easy-chair, and bent his head to examine the sketch upon the table with evident interest.

"By——!" thundered Carnes in a sudden rage at his effrontery, "*who are you, sir?*"

Then a burst of boyish laughter fell upon his astonished ears; the straggling locks of Mr. Bates came flying about his head, and a handsome, laughing face looked into his own. Carnes gasped with amazement, and dropped weakly into the nearest chair, then suddenly sprang up again and seized what remained of Mr. Bates in a bear-like embrace.

"Oh you reprobate! where did you hail from?" he exclaimed; "and what do you mean by coming in upon me in this fashion."

The young fellow laughed and seized both his hands in a hearty grasp.

"Carnes, old man, I'm glad to see you," he said, "and I couldn't resist the temptation to stir up your Irish a little. You see," settling back comfortably in his chair once more, "I'm trying to keep myself out of sight here and so did not like to call in *propria persona*. I'm doing a little business in the city."

Carnes drew up a chair so close to his friend that their knees almost touched.

"And how did you happen to spot me, Dick?" he asked.



"Saw you come in while I was spotting baggage."

"Spotting baggage, eh?"

"Yes, it's a little out of my line, but there have been some queer trunk robberies and I'm anxious to learn the game. I had forgotten your case almost. Is it finished?"

"My share in it is, I hope."

"And you succeeded?"

"Oh yes; but tell me about yourself, boy."

"Oh there's nothing to tell. I've been here and there. Nothing noteworthy since the Frisco case. What have you got here, Carnes?" he took up the unfinished pencil drawing and eyed it inquiringly.

Carnes laughed and stretched out his hand for the picture.

"Oh that's one of my whims," he said; "it's meant for a sketch of a fellow-prisoner—a chap who walked before me in the ranks, 'No. 46'."

"'No. 46', eh! Looks like an unfinished saint."

"An unfinished saint," repeated Carnes reflectively. "There's the rub. It's your unfinished saints that give us the greatest amount of trouble on this planet. A finished saint, one fully rounded with all the gaping possibilities filled up, might get on here, just *one* of him, but these fellows—now look at him!"

Carnes drew his chair up to the table and seized his pencil, making rapid strokes while he talked. "How is that for a countenance, refined, cultivated? there's a fastidious man—a man who is above common vulgarity, a thinker, a student; why the man carried an air of distinction even in his horizontal stripes—and yet—he has been in the penitentiary—and you and I know that saints, the genuine full-fledged article, are not in demand there."

"True," replied the other, giving to his friend's

whimsical statement a more literal rendering." The innocent man, the sensationalists to the contrary notwithstanding, is not often convicted, although he is many times accused. You seem to have taken a special interest in this man, Carnes; what do you know of him?"

"Nothing," replied Carnes slowly as if in self-wonderment, "simply nothing."

"Not his name?"

"No."

"His crime?"

"Forgery, note raising, something of that sort."

"And you have brought away with you this vivid reminder of an unknown convict?"

"I think," said Carnes, "that if I had left him behind, I should not have remembered him, but he is at large; we left on the same day, at the same moment; he in one carriage, I in another."

"Oh!" ejaculated young Stanhope, drawing the sketch toward him across the table.

"Burrowing so long among mysteries," went on Carnes musingly, "a man gets to indulging in strange fancies, in his moments of leisure. When I telegraphed for instructions an hour or so ago, I sort of turned myself loose, with nothing to do but entertain my own vagaries, and, confound it! I could do nothing but 'wonder how that man would employ himself now that he is his own master.' There let's drop him, boy. The fellow begins to annoy me."

But the younger man bent his head again over the outlined face.

"You know I have my own theory about faces," he said slowly.

"Sure, an' I niver knew yee's to have anyone else's theory for onything," blurted out Carnes, returning sud-



denly to his brogue after a fashion peculiar to himself, for he numbered among his whims that of more than half believing himself an Irishman.

"Every face has its possibilities," went on Stanhope, "and the language of the human countenance is the most difficult of all languages. But it *can* be mastered—in a life-time."

"Umph! I thought *you* professed to know it."

"I? I am only in the primer! I can read words of one syllable; faces that carry their trade-mark upon them, that are in the rough. Now you and I work sometimes, upon a shadow of proof, and there are men whom to suspect, would, in our judgment, amount to moral proof. We read their guilt, or their capacity for ill-doing, in their countenances—read it at first glance. But this man," tapping the picture with a slim forefinger, "I would study well before I ventured an opinion."

"Suppose," said Carnes, leaning forward—"suppose that this chap was accused or suspected of a crime and that the strongest proof against him was an insufficient bit of circumstantial evidence together with the fact that he was an ex-convict. How would you operate the case, Mr. Theorist?"

"I would begin by studying my man, not to convince myself of his guilt but of his capability for guilt. I would if possible associate myself with him intimately, for days, weeks, months; see him in all his phases, learn to know his face, his voice, his tricks of speech and expression. It's the only way to succeed with these cultured rogues. You can't deal with them in the ordinary way."

"Then you think that in six months you could gauge this man's capabilities, given the necessary close contact?"

"I believe that I could," said Stanhope firmly.

He laid the sketch down upon the table, then took it up again.

"You don't need this sketch to aid your memory?" he asked smilingly.

"Not I."

"Then," and he took out his pocket-book and stowed the paper carefully within, "I'll add it to my rogue's gallery; *you* can supply yourself with another, Carnes."

"I don't need one," said Carnes confidently; "I remember faces as well as you analyze them, boy."

No more was said of "No. 46." The two men were friends of years' standing—detectives in the same service, who had not met for many months.

Rufus Carnes was esteemed as one of the most reliable men of his force; strong, brave, shrewd and eccentric, and Richard Stanhope, a younger man by half a score of years, was rapidly gaining for himself a reputation as a most skillful detective, keen-witted, energetic, seeming to possess a genius for his profession; always self-reliant and original in his methods, a splendid mimic, and with a skill in disguise that was a wonder to all.

"So you have taken to piping baggage," queried Mr. Carnes, after some desultory talk.

"Yes. You wouldn't say there could be a piquancy in it, but there is."

"Umph! where?"

"I once thought that a trunk was a trunk, and nothing more, but there are trunks *and* trunks—they have an individuality. I can point out the difference between two trunks, that a casual observer would pronounce just alike, at a glance, and when in my future wanderings I chance to meet one of the trunks that have passed under my eye in this city, I shall recognize it as an old acquaintance, I shall recognize them everyone."

"Dick," said Carnes with much solemnity, "I'm afraid the physiognomy of things will unsettle you yet."



## CHAPTER III

### A SCHOLAR AND A GENTLEMAN

It was early dusk when Mr. Poinsett arrived in Chicago and took a carriage to the Palmer House.

During the short drive he peered curiously out through the carriage window, like a man who looks for the first time upon the scene before him, but on reaching the hotel he sauntered into the office with an air of careless indifference and scarcely deigned to glance at the somewhat too gorgeous surroundings.

There was a chill in the evening air, and he shivered slightly as he advanced to the desk and took up a pen.

"A good room, with a fire," he said to the beaming gentleman behind the register, and then he bent his head and wrote in a rapid graceful hand:

*"E. P. Edwards, Cincinnati, O."*

"In half an hour," he said slowly, as he laid aside the pen, "serve dinner in my room."

A small portmanteau had awaited him at the station at J— and had been checked through as being too burdensome for his well-gloved hand, and giving orders concerning the prompt delivery of this, he followed the servant who waited to conduct him to his room.

Once there he called for the daily papers, which he perused until the arrival of dinner, to which he did full but fastidious justice, and turned again to the newspapers.

After two hours passed in scanning numerous columns, he threw down the evening journal with a profound sigh.

"I can make nothing of them," he murmured. "I have lost the key to every situation, political, religious, social—everything. I have lost ten years and I must lose more time while I coach myself for a new start in life. Let me consider: It is April now, May, June, July! I must give myself two months if not three, in which to learn all that has happened in the world since I turned my back, very unwillingly, upon it. Ah, Madame Justice has given me ten years in which to consider what I would do at the end of that time. At least my thinking is done; I have now only to prepare for action."

As the next step in his career of "action," he gathered the scattered papers into an orderly pile, and then entered his bathroom. "Cleanliness," he murmured, "is next to godliness. Luxurious cleanliness is a hint of Paradise."

Having cleansed himself of the last atom of prison contact, he came forth from the bath in a glow of content, bestowed himself in such a bed as he had been long a stranger to, and fell asleep, like a man who has, indeed, nothing to think of.

His first act of the morning, after disposing of a breakfast dainty yet sufficient, is to call for a carriage and drive to the nearest fashionable tailor's, where he makes such additions to his hitherto limited wardrobe, as a gentleman too gentlemanly to descend to dandyism may need for a summer's campaign. Thence to the bank upon which his draft for ten thousand dollars is drawn, and then he makes a round of the newspaper offices, bookstores, news-stands—an eccentric round, his coachman thinks—but they keep on, lunching at a restaurant, and then recommencing their quest.

All day long packages for "E. P. Edwards" arrive at his hotel and accumulate in the room assigned to "Number 46" and when he returns, somewhat fatigued after his day's labor, he finds the place literally occupied.



Packages everywhere, on tables, on chairs, on the floor; he glances at them with a weary smile, and pushes a huge bundle from the easiest chair, into which he sinks with a sigh of mingled weariness and satisfaction.

"It is not so complete as I could wish," he soliloquizes; "but I think when the New York orders are filled, that it will suffice. To-morrow I will purchase trunks to contain my collection, and then—ho, for the country, to absorb in a few weeks the history of the events that have marked the passage of the last ten years."

For those packets and bundles, large and small, contained newspapers file upon file, books, pamphlets, periodicals, dating back two, three, five, ten years; such as could not be obtained in the city had been ordered from New York, and during the week that followed, they poured in upon him books and standard magazines, an avalanche of information, that would have appalled most men, but at which he smiled, and set himself to the task of classifying and arranging according to date, so that the oldest might come first to his hand when the mammoth trunks into which they were crowded should be opened for this strange student of modern history.

And it was not only a collection of news, letters, and records of current events that he proposed to master; there were novels, poems, essays, critiques, works of biography, the cream of the literature of the past half-score of years.

As his eye rested upon some of these a shadow crossed his usually placid face.

"Oh!" he muttered, "what a loss I have suffered at the hands of mine enemies! I, who hoped so much, who might have been—but pshaw, it is over, and I have the world before me once more; money in my purse and enough here," tapping his forehead lightly, "to do the rest."

He arose, went to a mirror on the opposite side of the room, and there surveyed his image with a critical eye.

"I might pass for twenty-five," he murmured. "Ten years have not aged me," and he continued to gaze with growing satisfaction at the image of the fair-faced scholarly-looking man that his mirror presented.

The fair face was as smooth as a girl's, and the close-cropped hair, though not quite in keeping with his general appearance, was soft and thick, and so purely blonde that it added to the youthfulness of his appearance.

"What a man is, you may guess from his habits," someone has said. During the two weeks that he remained in the city, "Mr. Edward's" habits were above criticism.

Reading the morning papers in the spacious office, replying with courteous reserve to the advances made by various genial *habitués*, unobtrusive, yet dignified, he won for himself admiration and respect. He smoked no cigars, not, as he explained to one of his respectful admirers, because of any scruples, but because he disliked the weed. He drank an occasional glass of wine, but shunned conviviality, believing, so he said, with a smile, that "a man should use wine as a beverage, not as a habit."

He disdained or ignored the theaters where sensation and novelty prevailed, on the ground that such catered to man's lower instincts; but he might have been seen once or twice, in a proscenium box, in company with two or three other gentlemen, applauding the scholarly interpretations of an eminent tragedian.

When he left the city, he bade a courteous farewell to the few who had made his acquaintance, and left in the minds of all, a most flattering impression.

"I am going into the country," he explained with one of his quiet smiles; "it is especially attractive to me at this season of the year. I have a whim for botanizing,



and a pronounced taste for geology—and then," smiling again as if half in derision of his own bookish propensities, "I like the *quiet* of the country."

When he had gone, some of them remembered that he had not named his destination.

It was evening when "No. 46" arrived at Roseville, a pretty village in the heart of green Illinois.

The place possessed a country hotel which was a model of its kind, and here he determined to establish himself. He had heard of Roseville and its simple attractions through a talkative commercial traveler, and had ventured thither solely upon these recommendations.

He found the Roseville House all that it had been painted, and at once opened negotiations with the "landlord," at the end of which he found himself in possession of two comfortable rooms; light, well-ventilated, and furnished with the traditional rag carpet of our grandmothers, with all the corresponding accompaniments, while mine host on his part was able to tell his wife, his neighbors and his guests, that the new boarder was a Mr. *E. P. Jermyn*, of New Orleans, who had come North for his health and for a respite from business, and who had chanced to come to Roseville through having read the recommendation given the town by the literary fisherman of the party, whose visit to its groves and streams was now a public reminiscence, special property of the Rosevillians.

"And is *that* all you know about him?" sniffed the wife of mine host, giving the vinegar cruet an emphatic shake, as they discussed things over a late dinner: "you might a' found *that* out by looking at his baggage. His *name* and where he *come* from! I'm goin' to know something more than *that*, before he's been in my house *another* night."



"A NICE MORNING, SIR," SHE BEGAN BRISKLY.—Slender Clue, p. 31.





And she did.

On the second morning of his stay at the Roseville House, while Mr. Jermyn, as he had chosen to call himself, having abstracted a file of newspapers from the one trunk which he had thought it wise to bring with him, was preparing himself for a morning's reading, the door of his sitting-room opened unceremoniously, and a thin-visaged elderly female, armed with a broom and a dusty rag, entered hastily.

"A nice morning, sir," she began briskly, with no shade of hesitation or fear of intrusion in voice or manner.

Mr. Jermyn raised his head and surveyed her with a glance of dreamy speculation. Then a remembrance of that sharp visage opposite mine host at breakfast crossed his mind and he said courteously:

"Good morning, madam—Mrs.—"

"Mrs. Brace," interpolated his visitor; "I thought you might want me to see after your room and things a bit—"

Mr. Jermyn roused himself.

"My room is in your hands, Mrs. Brace," he said; "but my belongings—that is to say, my articles of the toilet and wardrobe, and my books, papers, etc., I prefer to arrange myself. You will please instruct the chambermaid."

He nodded slightly and turned again to his file of papers. But Mrs. Brace retained her position near the center of the room and gave the dusty rag a little defiant flap while she renewed the attack.

"That's why I thought you might want *me* to look after your rooms *myself*. Bachelors *are* particular I know—that is—I *s'pose* you ain't a married man, Mr. Jerming?"

"I am so unfortunate, Mrs. Brace."

"Oh, you mayn't be so very unfortunate neither; Rose-



ville is running over with pretty girls, not to mention a good sprinklin' of old maids, but la! I don't s'pose *you* come here to find a sweetheart!"

Mr. Jermyn turned over a paper and looked at it gravely.

"Ye seem pretty well supplied with books, Mr. Jermyn," recommenced Mrs. Brace, elevating her broom to demolish an invisible cobweb. "Excuse my askin', but ain't you a minister—a—of some sort?"

Mr. Jermyn laid aside the file of papers and turned toward his questioner like a man resolved to face the inevitable.

"No," he said smiling slightly, "I am not a minister—of any sort."

Mrs. Brace dropped her broom to the floor and leaning upon it, looked at him with a speculative eye.

"You've got just the look for a minister," she said, "or a school professor, or the like."

"I'm a student, Mrs. Brace, simply that. I've a talent for investigating things; I hope to find much that is interesting in your village."

Mrs. Brace sat down upon the nearest chair, and smiled her approval of this candor. In her opinion the conversation had reached a confidential footing.

"I hope you won't get dull here," she said fervently. "I s'pose ye have a family, brothers and sisters, maybe?"

"My relatives are all in England."

"My! Then you're an Englishman?"

"Yes, madam."

She drew a quick breath and renewed the attack with eagerness.

"I s'pose then you're only over here to see the country?"

He smiled slightly. "I have been here for fifteen years," he said.

"Mercy! Now, how *ever* came you to come over here all by yourself, and so young as you must hev been?"

"Many young men come here from the other side, madam, because of the superior advantages a young man who wishes to make a career for himself, finds here."

Mrs. Brace ruminated a little over this sentence, then—

"So you came over here to settle?" she hazarded.

"I came to see the country—but remained—" he passed one slender hand across his face to conceal the smile that flitted over it, "because, really, I couldn't get away."

"So you like America?"

"Vastly."

"Most all emigrants does;" her victim seemed suddenly shaken with an inward convulsion. "So I s'pose *now*, you intend to settle here and be one of us?"

"Possibly."

"You must begin to feel quite at home here?"

"Oh, quite like an old resident." Mr. Jermyn arose and looked out of the window; Mrs. Brace arose too, and began moving the furniture about, preparatory to sweeping.

"Well, Mr. Jerming," she sighed, "I hope you'll like Roseville; it's a very sociable place, and you'll find it easy to git acquainted."

"I have not a doubt of it. However I came to Roseville for quiet and to study, rather than to enter into society, although, of course—"

Mrs. Brace had paused, broom in hand and she now interrupted him.

"If you won't think me inquisitive, Mr. Jerming, I *should* like to know what you are studying to be?"

Ideas were quickly suggested to Mr. Jermyn, and he was not slow to act upon them. He turned now to Mrs. Brace with a look of truthful frankness in his blue eyes.



"Your interest in a stranger like myself, madam, must surely be prompted by your kindness of heart, and I am grateful for it. I am not given to talking of my personal affairs, but will say to *you*, that which might not interest others. Most Englishmen, as you may know, have a prejudice against America as a habitation. I find this country to my liking and I remain here against the wishes of some of my friends. I came here, as I have said, for quiet, and to write some scientific articles for future publication." He crossed the room to turn the key in the lock of the huge trunk, remove it, and convey it to his pocket. Then he asked, as he took up his hat, "Do you give the rooms of your guests your personal care, Mrs. Brace?"

"I will look after *your* rooms myself," she answered quickly; "I thought you might *prefer* to have me."

"By all means, thank you."

He bowed affably, donned his hat as he crossed the door-sill, and went slowly down the old-fashioned steep stairs, leaving Mrs. Brace in full possession.

If one could have held a mirror up to the mind of Mr. Jermyn as he passed out from the house he might have read these words reflected there:

"For the mending of fools it is foolish to wait,  
Fools will be fools as certain as fate,  
Sons of wisdom, make them your tools!  
That, only that, is the use of fools."

A bright picturesque river ran straight through Roseville, and Mr. Jermyn turned away from the hotel and directed his steps river-ward.

As he passed a long low building in a fresh coat of paint and bearing upon its front the words *Printing Office*, he heard through the half-open door a trill of merry laughter and then a young girl appeared so suddenly through the doorway that she had all the effect of coming from within at a bound.

She carried in her hands a number of newspapers encased in brown wrappers and ready for the mail, and her eyes rested upon him for just an instant in an unabashed impersonal way that was not a stare, and scarce long enough to be called a look.

She might have looked just so at a handsome horse passing before her, only she would have looked longer and with growing admiration.

She flitted swiftly on before him until they reached the postoffice, which she entered, and Mr. Jermyn, sauntering a little in the rear, smiled to note that she did not turn her head to favor him with another glance.

"I wish she had," he said to himself in answer to his thought; "she has a fine face, a sweet voice, and a free, graceful gait. Just the walk all women should have; I wonder if it is a type common to Roseville?"

Half the inhabitants of Roseville, had they heard this question, would have uttered a most emphatic No. While the other half as a matter of course would have shouted yes. But there are no ears, fortunately for most of us, that catch the fall of a thought, and Mr. Jermyn, his question unanswered, walked slowly on, to pass an idle morning hour by the river side.

A few mornings after she had established herself on such a very friendly and confidential footing with her new boarder, Mrs. Brace, while engaged in dusting his book-table, made a discovery. It was a letter that was more than half-hidden between two books, a letter without its envelope and written upon fine thick paper. Mrs. Brace fairly trembled with delight, but before touching the letter with a finger tip she went briskly to the window and took a long look up and down the street. Next she opened the door and looked out into the narrow hall, and then she seized the letter and thrusting it into her



capacious pocket, beat a hasty retreat from the room.

A few moments later her voice came shrilly down to her worser half, where he sat comfortably smoking his clay pipe upon the veranda.

"Brace, Brace! Come up here this minute!

From long acquaintance with the gamut of his wife's voice, Mr. Brace knew that this was an imperative summons, and he lounged up the stairs, still smoking.

Mrs. Brace was sitting upon the side of their mutual couch in their joint sleeping room, an open letter in her hand, and signs of pleasurable excitement in her face.

"What did I *tell* you, Brace," she burst out, "didn't I *say* he was something uncommon!"

"Who?" questioned Brace tritely.

"Who! why him, the new boarder. Brace, read that!"

She thrust the letter into his wondering face, and he drew it from her hand, and lowered it to a more comfortable point of vision. This was the letter, dated from London, England."

"EDGAR POINSETT JERMYN:

"*Sir*—Your letter has lately reached me. Allow me to say that I quite disapprove of your course. Your fancy for remaining so long in that barbarous country is inexplicable to me as well as to your mother. Lady Mary is not in good health and your return would gratify her. As for myself I still say, as at first, I have ceased to dictate to my sons. Since your eldest brother has shown himself so regardless of my wishes and my youngest son has willfully forsaken his home and family, I am passive, and my children make or mar their destinies as they will. The Lady Stella, whose hand you rejected so shamelessly, is married at last, and to the Hon. Charles Lowton. So there is an end of that. I send you following this a draft on my bankers for two thousand pounds, all you need expect to receive during your mother's lifetime and mine. You have preferred to make your own career. See that it is not an ignoble one.

"RALPH FOSTER JERMYN, BART."

Mr. Brace puzzled so long over this missive that his wife fairly writhed with impatience. At last he removed the pipe from his mouth and gave utterance to a long, low whistle.

"Wall!" he ejaculated finally, "so it seems that he's really a high-flier, as near's I can make out of that. B-a-r-t—what's that stand for, mother?"

"That's what puzzles me," replied Mrs. Brace, once more taking possession of the letter. "But I mean to find out. Where's he gone, Brace?"

"Where's who gone?"

"Who! why him, Mr. Jermyn. Do you know where he went?"

"Down to the saw-mill to see the boys fish."

"Are ye sure?"

"Seen 'em go. Heard him ask the boys as polite as silk if they'd object to his company."

Thrusting the letter into her pocket again, Mrs. Brace pushed her husband aside with scant ceremony, rushed from the room and down the back-stairs calling as she went—"Julee; Julee Bra-ace."

A small girl with a solied face thrust her head out from some rear apartment near the foot of the stair-way.

"Wha-at!" she cried as if answering a call from the house-top.

"Julee," gasped Mrs. Brace, stopping for breath at the bottom of the stairs and lowering her voice to a mysterious whisper, "Julee, put on your bunnit"—puff—"an' run over to the printer's office"—a long breath—"an' ask Rene Brian if she will come over here *right away*. Tell her yer ma wants to see her about something particular and that I won't hender her five minutes."

As the kitchen door closed behind her messenger, Mrs. Brace turned with a sigh of relief and began slowly to



retrace her steps up the stairs. At the top she met her husband standing like a sentinel in waiting.

"Mother, what ye up to?" he asked uneasily.

"Look here, Brace, don't you worry me," she said; "Reeny Brian is a sensible close-mouthed little body. I'm goin' to ask her to explain some things to me. I ain't afraid to trust her."

Mr. Brace favored his wife with a broad grin, and began to move slowly toward the front stairs.

"Old woman," he said over his shoulder, "if ye git yerself into a scrape ye must git yerself out."

"Umph!" sniffed she, as she re-entered her chamber, "I'll risk myself."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WHEEL BEGINS TO TURN

"Wants to see me?" queried Rene Brian turning around upon her high stool with a half-filled "stick," in one hand and a capital letter B, in the other; for Rene was the sister of the village editor and assisted him at the compositor's case. "To see *me*? Really!"

Charlie Brian lifted a tired face from the proof before him and turned it toward her.

"You had better run over, Rene," he said, and then with a side glance at the messenger, he threw out between his teeth this hint: "s--scribers ye know."

"Ma she said she'd be awfully obliged and she won't keep ye a minit," added the veracious Julia, "an'she's—"

"Very well, Julia. To please you, Charl—" said Rene, slipping down from the stool, and depositing her type-stick carefully upon the desk. "Run home, Julia, and tell your mother I am coming in a moment."

When the child had gone Rene came to her brother's desk, untying her big gingham apron as she approached and said:

"Charlie Brian, do you want to see your poor little sister annihilated. Don't you know that I am going to my doom. Only last night Mrs. Tripp told us that Mrs. Brace was one of the six or more wrathful mammas whose darlings were not noticed in the report of the school exhibition. Mrs. Brace has found out that I wrote that report, and now you are sending me to beard the,—the—ogress in her den."



The editor laughed and stuck his pencil behind his ear.

"Young woman," he said severely, "delude yourself if you will; but don't attempt to delude me. Don't I know that a row with Mrs. Brace and all her tribe would be just to your taste. Have I not tested your warlike spirit? If you harbor a fear this moment it is that Mrs. Brace may have sent for you to borrow the pattern of your new jacket, or to ask you to show her how you make your dresses bunch up so Frenchily."

She shrugged her shoulders, hung her apron in a tiny closet, donned a little straw turban and moved with an air of mock hesitation toward the outer door, where she paused and turned with a tragic gesture.

"Charles Arthur Brian, farewell! for you may never see me again. O, if I am brought back to you a ghastly, 'bleeding corpse,' see that they bury me in my new gingham gown. I—I have never worn it."

Her exit was followed by a ringing laugh which came floating back to the ears of the young editor, and as he bent once more to his task he sighed:

"Poor Rene, I wish I could give her something better than gingham gowns."

For full fifteen minutes he worked on at the proof before him, the rueful look that had accompanied his brief soliloquy still resting on his face. At the end of that time the door was flung open with a force that caused it to rebound and come in sudden contact with the hand still outstretched, as in pushing it inward.

"What! Rene!" he began, then paused abruptly as he noted the cloud upon his sister's brow, and the ominous fire in her eye.

She turned swiftly upon the offending door, and closed it with a bang, using her left hand in so doing.

"Hurt, sis?" again hazarded the editor.

"*Hurt!*" Rene glanced ruefully down at her red right hand, back toward the door, and then crossing the room and seating herself in the big editorial chair, she broke into a laugh while the wrathful look yet shone in her eye, and some thought sent the blood, hotter and redder than before, up to cheek and forehead; after a moment she checked her laughter, which had a hint of nervousness in it, and sat silently smoothing her injured hand. Then she lifted her eyes to her brother's face and laughed again.

"I had a momentary sensation of having hurt my hand, Charl—but was, and am still, so engrossed by another sensation—"

"You need not name it," interrupted her brother, "I see it. It's written all over you—you are a three-sheet poster of wrath. Out with it, Rene; was it the exhibition?"

"The exhibition! would it had been."

"The—the French—drapery?"

"Charles *Brian!*"

"Rene—you alarm me. Has—has she asked you to marry her son Tom?"

Rene's anger vanished in a burst of merry laughter; she abandoned the editorial chair and came and leaned upon her brother's shoulder.

"Spare your wits, old boy," she said, still laughing, "and don't remonstrate when I say to you that never, never, never again will I go at your urgent bidding, to be interviewed, or to interview a Roseville subscriber. Do you know what that—that monument of impertinence entrapped me into doing?"

"Promise of—"

"Charl! don't aggravate me! she made me read a letter not intended for my eyes—or hers."

The editor's face grew serious.

"Rene, explain," he said anxiously.

"I found Mrs. Brace," began Rene slowly and with an intonation that warned her brother of her once more rising wrath. "I found her sitting upon the bed in her own private and especially hideous bower; she held a paper in her hand; she seemed to be in a hurry, and she made a dive at me the moment I appeared. 'Reeny,' she began, 'I hated to bother you, but I won't be long. I'm an old woman, an' I hain't got your eddication. Ive got somethin' here that I can't quite get through my head, the big names and all; an' I want to have ye read it to me. 'Taint every one that I'd ask it of, but I know you can be trusted; say Reeny, what does B-a-r-t mean?'

"'B-a-r-t,' I said, 'why that depends; it might be the nickname of a man, or it might be an abbreviation—'

"'A what?' she asked stupidly. 'An abbreviation,' I said again, whereupon she sighed and said, 'I can't make out; jest read that ere letter for me, Reeny, and tell me which kind of a Bart that one is.' I took the letter and read it through, and as I read I thought that somebody had played a practical joke upon her, although I could not quite comprehend it myself. It was dated from London, and purported to be a letter from a father in England to his son in America—and it was signed—listen, Charl—Ralph Forster Jermyn, *Baronet*."

"Phew!" interjected her listener.

"'There,' breaks out Mrs. Brace—Charlie, I can hardly resist the temptation to call her *terrible* names. 'That's it, Reeny, the B-a-r-t; *what* does it mean?'

"I explained the meaning of the title, and then that woman struck her two hands together and exclaimed:

"'My gracious! then he is the son of a *real lord*.' 'He!' I said carelessly; she clutched my arm and leaned over so close that I feared she intended to kiss me. 'Reeny,'



she whispered, 'I'll tell *you*, it's him, Mr. Jermyn, *our new boarder* that—lost this letter—jest think what a '*ristocrat* we've got among us!'

The narrative ended in an abrupt gurgle, and her listener looked up to see the fire once more alight in her eyes and to answer it with a like gleam in his own.

"Rene what did you do—or say."

"What!" striking her palms together fiercely. "I threw that letter down at her feet and I opened my mouth to pour out a volume of wrath; and then—a thrill of disgust ran over me, as my eyes encountered her shameless, unconscious, startled stare; I shut my lips tight together and rushed out of the room, and the house."

Charles Brian turned on his stool and passed an arm about his sister's shoulders.

"Little girl," he said gently, "I did not dream of anything so serious as this."

"Serious!" reaching up her injured hand to clasp the fingers that lay upon her shoulder, "why Charlie I feel like a pickpocket. Think how *deliberately* I read that man's letter."

"Its precisely what I am thinking about, sis; but don't let it fret you. Listen; that's Gorman stumbling in; not yet sober I suppose. Let me finish this proof, and we will talk over this affair at noon."

Gorman, the typical journeyman printer came lounging in, and Rene returned slowly to her case, and her typesetting; but the red flush still dyed her cheek, and the indignant light yet gleamed in her eye, when twelve o'clock struck and Charles Brian pushed aside his copy and said over his shoulder:

"Now for it, Rene."

## CHAPTER V

### A TASTE OF ARISTOCRACY

Mr. Jermyn was not the man to interest himself overmuch in the events and inhabitants of Roseville, and yet he had not been long in the village before he knew much of its social and inner life, if a community so small that each individual happening, in the dearth of larger interests, becomes public property, and where nothing can occur, and remain hidden from the scrutiny of ten hundred inhabitants who are constantly on the alert, may be said to possess an inner life.

Mr. Jermyn, although naturally reserved, was a good listener, and with no visible effort on his part he was soon acquainted with many facts that were considered important by the Rosevillians.

He knew that Roseville possessed an aristocracy, and of whom and what it consisted; he knew that it held a small minority who disclaimed all fellowship with this aristocracy, and yet were qualified, in all things save length of purse, to stand at its head. Foremost among this independent minority were Charles Brian and his sister, orphans whose parents had been able to bestow upon them a fund of natural intelligence, a careful education, sound moral and mental culture, and sundry gifts and graces of manner, that, more than all the rest, recommended them to some, while more than all the rest they rendered them obnoxious to others.

With these equipments the brother and sister had come to Roseville from their native university town,

lured thither by the possibilities that appeared to them in the fact that Roseville lacked, and needed, a newspaper, and here they had made friends and enemies, as must have been given Charles and Rene Brian, and—given—Roseville.

But holding itself equally aloof, as Mr. Jermyn soon learned from the plebeians and the aristocrats of Roseville was another social circle, the "great folks on the Hills."

The Barings, two brothers, each possessing a comfortable amount of capital, had migrated from eastward and made what they considered a temporary halt near Roseville, with the intention of investing some of their surplus capital in land.

But Jacob Baring, who was born with a mania for geological investigations, and who after years of exploration and travel had settled into an experimenting mineralogist, had discovered, while inspecting a tract of meadow land, that the soil was underlaid with a pale clay that is rarely found and could be put to profitable uses, and then John Baring, who could supplement his brother's mineralogical talent with shrewd business qualifications, invented a scheme by which to utilize his brother's discovery.

The result was a purchase of the land "for building purposes" at a moderate price; opening up of large clay beds; a factory for the manufacture of various articles of pottery; removal of the families of the Baring brothers to Roseville, and later on, the building of two fine mansions upon two adjoining hills; a doubling up of the Baring wealth, and a wonderful increase in the Baring pride.

Mrs. Jacob Baring was a member of an old Philadelphia family, and every year she journeyed to the home of her youth, returning to open her house in the summer



months to a flock of fashionable guests. Her only daughter had married a gentleman of Philadelphia and lived in that city, and since her marriage Mrs. Jacob Baring had kept a spring-like element about her, by bringing and keeping one or more of her nieces from the East, as a resident of Rose Hill Place.

John Baring had two daughters who had received all the benefits to be derived from a fashionable school for young ladies, and who now needed only a tour upon the continent to complete them, and make of them all that an aspiring mother and a wealthy father could desire or expect.

Th two families lived upon the most friendly and social terms, each upholding the dignity of the other and both extending to the lesser denizens of Roseville a patronage not too haughty, nor yet too cordial. And as even daughters of aristocratic parents are born with some of the commonest of tastes and attributes, the daughters of John Baring and the nieces of Mrs. Jacob Baring found the society of a few of Roseville's most eligible young men not entirely beneath them, at such times, as they, lacking greater excitements, desired to amuse themselves with lawn parties, tennis, tea drinkings, and tableaux.

It became, thus, almost a matter of necessity to be more or less civil to a few of Roseville's daughters, and the fact that Charlie Brian was a handsome and promising young fellow may have had some weight in making Rene Brian a favorite with the young ladies upon the Hills.

All these things came to Mr. Jermyn's knowledge, within a few days, together with many other matters more scandalous, and, to him, less interesting.

A few days after Mrs. Brace's discovery of the foreign letter, Mr. Jermyn sauntered across the street and entered the printing office.

It was not their busiest day; the paper had been issued the evening before, and both compositor and apprentice were absent, while the editor sat at his desk, folding and superscribing some letters just written and intended for the evening mail, and Rene stood near a window scanning with a bored look a pile of exchanges that lay upon a stool beside her.

Mr. Jermyn lifted his hat from his head, as he entered the door, with a graceful gesture indicating his recognition of the presence of a lady; and, with just one glance in the direction of the window where Rene stood, he crossed the room, halting before the editor's chair.

"Mr. Brian I presume?"

Mr. Brian bowed and rose from his seat.

"Be seated, sir, I beg," said Mr. Jermyn courteously. "Have I called at a time when you are too much occupied to attend to my small business?"

Charlie Brian moved forward his own chair and drew up for himself another.

"I am not especially busy," he said, feeling somehow relieved by the serenity of his visitor, for he had at first thought connected this visit with his sister's unfortunate knowledge of that foreign letter. "This is not our busiest day."

"I am glad of that;" he seated himself in compliance with a gesture from Mr. Brian--"for my errand is so trifling. or would appear so to you, if I had chanced to intrude upon your busiest hours."

He smiled slightly and put his hand into a breast pocket, withdrawing from thence a folded bit of paper.

"It's only the printing of a few words," and he laid the paper open upon the desk at the editor's elbow, leaning forward to do this, and as he drew back, lifting, an instant, his eyes, still smiling, to meet the eyes of the editor.

Mr. Brian took up the paper and glanced at it, thinking as he did so that his visitor was certainly a frank and unassuming person, and then he smiled in his turn.

"It's a title?" he said interrogatively.

"Yes."

"Then you want—"

"Two or three slips, and—" here the visitor smiled again, "I hardly know how to say it. Mr. Brian, I am about to throw myself on your mercy. I have been in Roseville less than a week but—" here the smile deepened. "I have learned to fear it."

Charles Brian laughed, even while his face wore a puzzled expression, and Rene Brian colored furiously and began to gather up her exchanges with hasty, nervous fingers.

"I can understand that feeling," said Brian. "I was new to Roseville myself not long ago."

"Ah! then you will pardon me if I say, what no doubt is quite unnecessary. Don't let *Agamemnon and Menelaus* out of your fingers. Don't let any one who might whisper it in Roseville know that I am—"

"An author," supplied Brian, "an expounder of the classics."

"A pretender to authorship, only; Mr. Brian, I hope you appreciate my motive. I find myself, as a stranger, sufficiently conspicuous in your village already."

"I don't doubt it." And Charles Brian's eyes twinkled as if some former experience of his own had suddenly presented itself before his mental vision.

"Your secret shall be safe, sir." He lowered his eyes to the bit of paper and reperused its contents:

## AGAMEMNON AND MENELAUS

A PARALLEL

BY

E. P. JERMYN



and then placed it carefully in his own pocket-book. Having done this he glanced over at the window where Rene was engaged in rolling up her bundle of exchanges.

Mr. Jermyn sat silent for moment and then putting his hand again to his pocket he drew out a card and proffered it to his *vis a vis*, who received it with a start, turning his eyes from his sister's face as if almost detected in an unwarrantable action.

"Allow me," said Mr. Jermyn with another of his engaging smiles. "The knowledge that you have been, like myself, a stranger here, makes me desire your acquaintance."

"And sympathy?" added Brian, glancing down at the card. "I am very glad to know you, sir."

And the two arose and shook each other by the hand, each greeting the other with a low laugh.

"I will endeavor not to be a troublesome acquaintance," said Mr. Jermyn, reseating himself. "The truth is it's my first experience in an American village—and I begin to think that I am laboring under some disadvantage."

He lifted his eyes to let them rest upon Rene, who was crossing the room hurriedly, to vanish for a moment in the little closet, and to reappear, with crimson cheeks, her straw turban pulled far down upon her brow and the packet of papers upon her arm.

"Rene," said her brother in a low tone, "I wish you would take these letters with you."

Mr. Jermyn's calm eye noted a shade of embarrassment in his tone, and the start and flush with which she greeted his words, and he rose hastily.

"Mr. Brian," he said, "I feel that I am in some way troubling you or trespassing upon your time; I am driving away this young lady."

Charlie Brian, who had been hurriedly gathering the letters from off his desk, turned quickly.

"No, Mr. Jermyn, I beg of you—" and then seeing his gaze still fixed upon Rene, he said, as he stepped toward her with the letters:

"It is my sister, Miss Brian. Rene, allow me to introduce Mr. Jermyn."

Rene Brian favored the stranger with a very haughty bow, and casting upon her brother a look of mingled reproach and defiance, snatched the letters from his outstretched hand, and without one backward glance, hurried from the office.

"I fear," said Mr. Jermyn, taking up his hat, "that without design, I have by my coming at this time, annoyed Miss Brian."

"Annoyed is not the word," said the other gravely. "My sister *was* embarrassed. Pray reseate yourself, Mr. Jermyn; I—I feel somewhat embarrassed myself," his fine frank face flushing slightly. "But I owe you an explanation."

"Pardon me; an explanation?"

Mr. Jermyn stood for a moment, then seeing the anxiety upon the face of the other, he sat down, saying: "I do not understand you, Mr. Brian."

"I hope that you will, at least, understand my motive, and exonerate my sister, Mr. Jermyn, when you have heard me."

"Your sister. Miss Brian?"

"Listen;" Charlie Brian fixed his frank eyes upon the face of his visitor, and, beginning with the flying visit from Julia Brace, told the story of the letter; all of it, as Rene had told it to him.

"We have talked this matter over," he said in conclusion, "and I had convinced Rene that it was right to make it known to you, should a suitable opportunity present itself. You can scarcely wonder now at my sister's confusion when you came in upon us, and by your

request in regard to your authorship made it as plain to her as to me, that the time for confession had come."

Mr. Jermyn had listened at first with a look of surprise and annoyance, but his countenance soon resumed its accustomed tranquillity, and when the speaker paused, he lifted his head and laughed a low, mellow laugh.

"Fate *has* ordained it," he said lightly; "again I am at your mercy, yours and—but no." He paused suddenly and the smile forsook his face.

"In this case," said Brian, "you are out of my hands. You are at the mercy of Mrs. Brace."

Mr. Jermyn looked serious, then smiled again.

"I confess," he said, "that this thing annoys me. I hoped to dwell quietly here for a few months. Am I to be driven away from Roseville because this old woman has pried into my family affairs?"

"I hope not, Mr. Jermyn."

"But—what will come of it? I am putting your sister and yourself out of the question. It rests between Mrs. Brace and me."

Charlie Brian laughed, in spite of his desire to look solemn.

"Do you really wish to know?" he asked.

"I really do."

"Then, it will come about in this fashion: Mrs. Brace will preserve, say *has* preserved, a brief silence on the subject, owing to my sister's unsatisfactory conduct, but she will be true to her nature. After waiting and looking for an explosion, she will begin to feel that after all there has been no harm done. Then she will tell Mrs. Allsop—and Mrs. Allsop is her most intimate friend—no, 'crony' is the word, and a gossip second only to Mrs. Brace herself."

"Say no more! Mrs. Allsop, then, means all Roseville. Is there any way of bridling Mrs. Brace's tongue?"



"No, not permanently. You might confront and accuse her, it would only make a scene, fire her temper, and send the story broadcast, with such embellishments as would astound you."

"I like Roseville," said Mr. Jermyn reflectively, "but perhaps I would better leave it."

"It won't do much good. Your history will be given to Roseville *then*, accompanied by red fire—excuse me."

Mr. Jermyn bowed gravely, leaned back in his chair and seemed to meditate. Then he said, slowly, as if still thinking:

"I regret this business; and I see that, as you say, it is past remedy. I congratulate myself, however, that the discovery made by Mrs. Brace came, as it did, to you. I am not a man to talk of family affairs, and but for this woman's curiosity, I should have been slow to speak of myself. But I may say to you now, relying upon you to use the information as may seem good, when we know how much this gossiping woman misrepresents or distorts the truth, that I am that usually unfortunate being, the younger son of an English gentleman; that I left my home and country, the first because I could not decide to marry the woman my parents had chosen for me, and the second, because my brain was filled with wonderful ideas of this new world."

He paused a moment, sighed heavily, and then resumed:

"My father's pride and my own obstinacy, have kept us apart. No welcome awaited me across the water, and so I have remained here. The letter that your sister saw was in answer to one from me, written in a moment when my heart softened toward those at home. It was not a cordial letter, and here let me explain; when I left England, and up to the date on which I received that letter, my father was Ralph Forster Jermyn, Esq. The title which so puzzled my landlady was affixed to

notify me that the death of a relative has made him a baronet. It was like him, this method of informing me of his accession. It was very like him."

Again he paused for a moment, then—"I hope that my private affairs will not prove interesting to Roseville," he said, "but should Mrs. Brace and her coterie make me appear in a too lurid light, you have my authority for this much: my permission to use the facts I have stated whenever it may seem to you worth while."

Charlie Brian bowed his acknowledgment of this confidence.

"As to Miss Brian," continued Mr. Jermyn, "Mrs. Brace did me a great injury when she gave her my letter to read, if it has caused her to look upon me with disfavor. Assure her for me, that I am actually indebted to her. But for her that letter might have fallen into the hands of—some one with less delicacy. And—I might not have had the pleasure of this meeting and of claiming at least one acquaintance in my solitude."

"Oh you will find yourself claimed by numerous acquaintances, once Mrs. Brace loosens her tongue," said Charles Brian with a touch of bitterness in his tone; "all our aristocracy will be at your feet."

"Really? Roseville has then an aristocracy?"

"It has indeed."

"Ah, well, Mr. Brian, I shall be your old man of the sea.' I shall expect you to direct my course, lest through my lack of knowledge, I fail to recognize properly this aristocracy, and so fall into bad company."

"If my sister were here, she would tell you promptly, that you had already fallen into bad company."

"Would she?" rising slowly and smiling down upon his new acquaintance. "We should disagree then. For, don't publish it to your aristocracy, Mr. Brian; I am, in spite of my titled ancestry, very Bohemian in my tastes."

Some one tapped quickly at the outer door, then threw it wide open and the two men saw in the doorway a dainty vision.

Two young girls closely resembling each other in feature and dress stood before them, their lovely faces smiling yet startled, their rich dresses making fine effect opposed to the plainness of the room.

"Pardon us, Mr. Brian," said the foremost one, dimpling and blushing; "we expected to find Rene here."

"She has just gone."

"Oh! then we may overtake her; good afternoon."

She nodded brightly and turned away still blushing, and followed by her companion.

When the door had closed behind them, Mr. Jermyn turned to the editor.

"Is that," he asked "a sample of your Roseville aristocracy?"

"No," answered Charlie Brian, his face flushing, "that is the genuine article, the ladies of Laurel Hill."



## CHAPTER VI

### BESIEGED BY SOCIETY

The acquaintance thus begun between Charles Brian and Mr. Jermyn was not permitted to languish.

The young editor, on his part, would not have taken the initiative even though Mr. Jermyn seemed to him to be a man well worth knowing, for he was poor, he was proud, he was independent; and he felt that friendly overtures, if they were made, were not to be made by him.

But Mr. Jermyn, in his quiet way, with a mixture of dignity and frankness which when his circle of acquaintances became wider, he was never observed to use in addressing others, pressed down his barriers of pride and reserve, and sought his society as a matter of course. Not obtrusively, not in a patronizing manner, but as equal meets equal.

"I am trying not to overestimate my privileges," he said one morning with his quiet smile, coming into the office and standing beside the editor's desk—"I try to remember that where I have only one acquaintance you have many friends. I hoped that you would look in upon me at the Roseville House, but—"

The editor's hands went up in a quick gesture.

"My dear sir," he cried, "how *could* you; or, rather, how could *I*, without encountering Mrs. Brace, with, heaven only knows what awful results?"

"Mrs. Brace?" slightly elevating his brows, "I had not thought of her. Does she carry her vendettas so far?"

"Undoubtedly. I should not like to throw myself in her way."

"Then I am appeased, and, Mr. Brian, if I do not make myself personally obnoxious to you, I intend to drop in upon you occasionally, although the very cold recognition vouchsafed me by Miss Brian, this very morning, leads me to fear that she has her vendetta too."

The young editor laughed.

"I think Rene has not been able to separate you from Mrs. Brace; the sight of either brings to her the recollection of that letter, and the embarrassment it has caused her."

"I wish she would forget that letter," said Mr. Jermyn gravely, "or look upon the matter as I do. It will be my turn to be aggrieved if she does not soon take a milder view of things; I could never associate *her* with Mrs. Brace."

But Rene found it difficult to forget, or to take a new view of things; she received his courtesies with perfect politeness and a calm reserve that caused him to wonder a little, perhaps to feel some slight annoyance, which, however, never manifested itself by look or word, and, that attracted him, when it was honestly meant to repel.

"She is a charming girl," he assured himself. "And she will develop into a magnificent woman; I must try and make her understand me better. It's a pity she—"

But Mr. Jermyn added to his reserve, discretion; and just here he closed his lips, and shut behind them the remainder of the sentence.

His huge trunks of books came duly from the city, and were inspected, outwardly, wondered at, and deposited in his sitting-room, where they stood securely locked, in the absence of their owner, and proof against the curiosity of Mrs. Brace, who still retained the care of the rooms.

She had restored the letter to its place between the books, and had awaited with some misgivings the result of her confidence, sadly misplaced—she felt it to have been—in Rene Brian.

But nothing came of her waiting, no word from Rene, no hint from Mr. Jermyn that he had found his letter not exactly as he left it, and so, after keeping her secret, with great difficulty, for more than a week, Mrs. Brace fulfilled Charlie Brian's prediction, and told Mrs. Allsop.

Mrs. Allsop possessed something more than the ordinary ability to absorb and disseminate news; she was a prophetess as well, and had a talent for "seeing through" things, especially those intricate things of flesh and blood, so dense and unreadable to most of us.

"Umph!" said Mrs. Allsop, after she had given due consideration to Mrs. Brace's recital, and made wise comments upon some portions of it. "Umph! It's easy enough to see why Reeny Brian ain't never told about her seein' the letter. *She* ain't agoin' to make you any trouble—she's too cunnin' for that. *I* can see clean through that girl."

Mrs. Brace leaned quickly forward and gazed at her friend with eager eyes; she could not see through Rene Brian and she was full of admiration for the woman who could.

"It's as *plain* to *me*," Mrs. Allsop added, "as 'a-b-c'"—this was an oft-used alliteration of hers, and she was proud of it. "Im s'prised that *you* don't see through it, Mrs. Brace."

"I don't know," sighed Mrs. Brace shaking her head and reluctantly yielding up in this matter, the palm of superiority; "I must say *I* don't see."

This was Mrs. Allsop's moment of triumph, and she settled back in her squeaky rocking-chair, crossed two



fat hands over a stomach very comfortably adapted for a resting place, and let her swaying chair creak a brief overture.

Then she began:

If folks don't find out who your Englisher is till Reeny Brian tells 'em, they won't find it out in a hurry! An' you *mark* my word an' *see* if Reeny ain't the first girl in Roseville to scrape acquaintance with him. An' she won't let Molly Craig nor Belle Newcome nor the Baring girls into the secret as long as *she* can keep 'em out. Them Barings hold their heads mighty high, but I guess they wouldn't let Reeny have him all to herself if they found out he had a Lord for his father, and lots of high-flyin' connecshuns to boot."

"No," said Mrs. Brace, "I reckon they *wouldn't*"—and then she added with the pride of a discoverer: "He's a notch higher up in the world than *them* anyhow."

"That's so," assented Mrs. Allsop, as if willing to concede something, out of the abundance of her worldly wisdom—"that's *so*, an' you *mark* my *word*, when it leaks out who he is, an' the Barings make a set at him, they won't be so sweet on Reeny Brian, nor on Charley neither, maybe!"

Possibly Rene Brian had foreseen some such conclusions, knowing as she did Mrs. Brace and her friend—and herein, perhaps, lay her reason for avoiding, as much as possible, all encounters with Mr. Jermyn, and for receiving such of his courtesies as she could not avoid, with such marked indifference. And this reason may have been strengthened, by the pictured face that looked down upon her from the wall of her own little room; and by certain letters white and thick, that came regularly into her hand on Mondays and Thursdays.

Whatever reason she may have had, her indifference to the fine-mannered stranger was evident to him, at

least; and it pricked through his splendid serenity, touched his pride, and awakened such an interest in the pretty, piquant, unimpressible little damsel, as he might not otherwise have felt.

Mrs. Allsop had predicted that the secret of the stranger's identity would soon leak out, in spite of Rene Brian's artful reticence—and it did.

Shortly after the secret came into her possession, Mrs. Allsop deposited it for safe-keeping in the bosom of the village dressmaker, and there all trace of its source became lost, and it wafted about Roseville, borne on the unsubstantial wings of "I heard" and "they say."

Disembarrassed of all individual authority, its progress was wonderful; and Mr. Jermyn became the center of interest—the most notable object in all Roseville.

Even the movements of the Hill dwellers, diminished to little importance. Public interest forgot them; the public gaze withdrew itself from the two mansions and became fixed upon the Roseville House, and when Mr. Jermyn chanced to be there, the printing office.

Questions poured in upon Mrs. Brace, who must know as a matter of course much that was interesting concerning her boarder. Callers whose footsteps had rarely or never crossed her threshold suddenly remembered her, and paid their respects in the parlors of the "Roseville."

Charlie Brian was in sudden demand upon all social occasions, and was made much of by the belles of Roseville. And Rene was coaxed and quizzed by turns, much to her annoyance and discomfort.

While this was going on all about him, Mr. Jermyn continued to go and come quite as if he were not aware how large a place he occupied in the public interest. He wrote for hours at a time, he took long walks, he bought a boat, had it newly painted, and rowed and fished upon the river, and unobtrusively, but persistently, he

cultivated the acquaintance of Charlie Brian, choosing his time with rare tact, never visiting the office on "paper days," or at the hours when the editor was likely to be busiest, and never making his stay too long.

He was a good talker and a good listener, and Charlie Brian soon found his reserve melting.

"It's of no use," he said one day to his sister. "Don't lecture me any more, sis. The Englishman is a fine fellow, and good society is not so plentiful here that one can afford to throw it over one's shoulder. Your attitude is excellent; you couldn't do better—being you. But I can't fence him out. He extends his companionship in such a frank and unassuming way that I would be a churl to reject it."

But he did not dream what his resolve would lead to. No sooner was he seen to walk, to drive, to fish and row with Mr. Jermyn, than his troubles began. Invitations, verbal and written, poured in upon him; to cards, to teas, to croquet, to tennis, to lawn socials; and always these invitations, formality not being the rule in Roseville, included Mr. Jermyn.

For a time he struggled, prevaricated, fabricated, alone, but one day his torment gave itself utterance.

They were rowing down the river and passing out of the town, when the sight of a pony phaeton, driven slowly along the road that ran close to the river bank for miles, seemed to fire the train of thought that for some moments had held full possession of the young editor.

He returned the bow vouchsafed him by one of the ladies who occupied the phaeton, turned away to frown down into the water rippling about the boat, and then uttered a short laugh.

"Do you know," he said with a mixture of jest and earnest, "that I hold you responsible for any number of sins of mine?"



"Indeed! no," Mr. Jermyn smiled and then placidly awaited an explanation.

"The fact is," repeating his laugh, "that you have been found out."

Mr. Jermyn started slightly.

"And," went on his companion, "*I* am the man who suffers."

"Pray explain."

"I will. I must," tragically. "Don't you know that from the moment, almost, when I was first seen in your society I have been besieged?"

"How?"

"For introductions, for information concerning you, for everything."

"Really." Mr Jermyn was evidently amused.

"Oh, you can afford to be calm. It's not you that suffers. But look at me. I am urged to bring you here, there, everywhere! to tea fights, to socials, to anything that will give the ladies a chance at you." He sank his voice to a low whisper. "I should never dare say these things if we were not in the middle of the river. Do—do you see any mermaids about your end of the boat?"

Mr. Jermyn looked gravely down into the water.

"No," he said. "I think that you are quite safe here. But seriously, Mr. Brian, I did not anticipate this; I can see how, in your position, it must annoy you."

"Annoy me?" The editor's eyes twinkled, but he preserved a grave face. "You don't use the right word. It's my conscience that hurts, and my sympathies. Imagine my feelings when I am obliged to deny to so many ladies the pleasure of your society."

Mr. Jermyn looked very grave, and seemed to reflect.

"Are you quite serious about all these invitations, Brian?" he asked finally.

"Serious? Look here!" Brian thrust his hand into a

breast pocket and from a handful of letters selected half a dozen billets and held them out to his questioner.

But Mr. Jermyn shook his head.

"The testimony is sufficient," he said. "And in spite of your jocose way of taking it, I can see how this folly may be slightly unpleasant to you. These people are your readers, your subscribers, the wives and daughters of your advertising patrons. I shall carry about with me an uneasy conscience until I have contrived to shift **this** responsibility from *your* shoulders to *mine*."

"The responsibility of saying no, with embellishments that shall make no as sweet as yes? Of uttering sinfully false excuses? of—postponing, equivocating? My dear sir, what man can do these things so well as an editor."

"No doubt you excel; but I did not mean to supersede you in these specialties of yours. I must immolate myself—and you."

"What?—how?"

"Softly. I think we can extricate ourselves. What invitations have you that have not yet been 'declined with thanks?'"

Brian groaned.

"Only two," he said. "I don't let them accumulate. Yesterday you might have had six. One of the two is for a tea fight at Mrs. Craig's, that's—let me see, next Tuesday; the other is for the following day: croquet at Squire Dixon's."

"And these invitations are extended to me through you?"

"Yes."

"I can accept them through you, according to Roseville etiquette?"

"My dear sir, *you* can do *anything*, according to Roseville etiquette."

"Then," said Mr. Jermyn with his usual slow smile, "if you feel equal to it you may accept the invitations."

"For you!" cried Brian in surprise.

"For both of us."

"Phew!" drawing in a deep breath. "I didn't think you would do it—would care to meet these people."

"I do not," said Mr. Jermyn quietly. "But this is the only way to extricate you and place the responsibility where it should rest—upon my own shoulders. It can't take long to make me known to all these people?"

"No. When once they know you are to be had for the asking, they will all invite you to tea or some other *fol de rol* within a week."

"Then in a week we shall both be emancipated. You shall introduce me, that done you have done your part. Having been made known, their invitations, if I am favored with a repetition, will come, of course, to me personally."

"Of course," assented Brian.

"Well then, upon me will devolve the pleasure of accepting—or refusing."

"I see," said Brian, and he took up his oars and rowed on in silence, while Mr. Jermyn sat absently gazing shoreward, as if beset with no social perplexities.

He had played his first card in a mighty game, and won.

Here in quiet Roseville, aided by the hand of commonplace, ignorant Mrs. Brace, he had laid the foundation for a new career, strange, terrible, tragic—fraught with sorrow and danger to many, with death to some.



## CHAPTER VII

### HIS "LUCKY" MORNING

Hardly six weeks have passed since E. P. Jermyn, late "No. 46," doffed his prison garb, and yet, so strangely are some of us led, or driven by the Fates, already he was gathering, one by one, but swiftly, new threads for the weird dame's future weaving.

It was the day following that on which he had graciously proposed to accept the hospitalities of Roseville, and so free Charlie Brian from too much responsibility; and Mr. Jermyn entered his boat, while the morning was yet fresh and dewy, and drifted down the pretty river, his pockets stuffed with illustrated papers and magazines.

It was easy rowing, and he found himself, after what seemed a very brief time, several miles from Roseville.

"This will do," he said to himself. "This looks silent and sylvan." He rowed shoreward, and stepped from the boat where the grass upon a gentle slope grew to the very water's edge.

Fastening his boat, he ascended the slope and entered the wood, finding it sylvan indeed.

Near the river was a narrow but well-defined foot-path winding its way through dense underbrush difficult to penetrate, and coming out from this, some distance below the spot where his boat was moored, he found himself upon a jutting rock, against which the slope leaned and lost itself beneath its undergrowth of tangled brush and overrunning vines. He had scarcely noticed the

ascent, yet now he found that he was looking straight downward thirty feet or more, upon a jagged ledge standing out of the water like giant teeth and the river dark and still and deep about them.

"Ugh," he said aloud, "what an uncanny place to be in the heart of this calm retreat! Quite hidden too." He looked again upon the jagged rocks below him, and moved back shuddering.

"How hidden it is! concealed from either side by this dense growth, and the curve of the banks, and that water!" He threw himself down and peered over the ledge. "It looks deep! It looks *dangerous!*" he said.

About him was an open space, smooth and mossy, except for a narrow strip just at the rock's outer edge; and drawing back a little, he seated himself and was about to take one of the magazines from his pocket when he heard the sound of crackling twigs, breaking short and sharp as if beneath a heavy and hasty foot.

With a nimble movement, the pamphlet was thrust back into the big square pocket.

"I'd rather *see* than *be* seen," said Mr. Jermyn to himself, and he crossed the small open space and vanished among the vines and bushes growing about the rock's side; almost at the same moment, a man came out from the woods that stretched thick and gloomy back from the river, with only here and there a glimpse of the sky where a bridle path led to the water's edge, passing close behind the moss-grown rock, and descending to the river a little beyond it.

It was a strange figure which came out upon the rock and stood there motionless, with bent head and eyes that seemed fixed upon some inward vision, strange and uncanny; not at all like the gentlemanly personage who had just left the place. He was tall and large of frame, with big hands and feet, and a slouching droop of the

shoulders; his clothes hung upon him, ill-fitting and slovenly, looking as if they had been forced through brush and brier, they were so tattered and soiled. The whole man looked unkempt and woful. The coarse black hair was matted; the black eyes looked out from above hollow, unshaven cheeks, with a glittering, wolfish stare; a fearful look, such as might have been worn by a madman.

But ragged and unkempt as he was, it was not the accustomed rags and wofulness of the professional tramp and beggar, but, rather, the abandonment of a rugged soul, driven out from its moorings, beaten and buffeted by some terrible fear, or loss, or sin.

For a moment the man stood upon the rock's edge silent and moveless; then, as Jermyn had done before him, he prostrated himself and looked down at the dark and silent waters encircling the jagged, protruding rocks. But E. Percy Jermyn had laid himself down lightly, and looked with only his gentlemanly head protruding above the rocky teeth. *This* man flung himself down suddenly, and half his body was thrust out over the abyss.

Sitting upon a prostrate log, among the bushes and wishing himself back in his jaunty boat, Jermyn heard the man mutter as he hung above the ledge.

"How easy—how easy!" then suddenly he drew back, uttering a stifled cry. "Curse her! *curse her!*" and he flung himself back with his face upturned; and beat his breast with his brawny fists. For a long moment he lay thus, then the blows ceased; he sat erect and looked about him with the air of a man exhausted with his own ferocity, and great sighs burst from his lips. Then again his mood changed. He put his hand to his breast and drew from it a small hunting watch.

"Perhaps it's wrong," Jermyn heard him say. "Perhaps she is late."



Watch in hand he sat for several moments, silent and moveless, except for the nervous twitching of the large beardless mouth, and an occasional jerking of the hands. Then the watch was restored to its place, and the man threw himself down once more and abandoned himself to a paroxysm of rage or despair, or both. Jermyn was watching him now with increasing interest, and no further thought of making his escape.

Who was this man with the strong physique and the face which was so rugged, so fierce? This was not a man to lightly yield to grief; such a man might be cruel; he might yield himself to rage, but *this* was something more than rage, although rage was there.

Clearly the man was no maniac, yet such a man, so strongly wrought upon, could not be far from the way "where madness lies."

*What* could have brought him to this? What indeed! His own lips had revealed his secret; *a woman*.

Once again the moans and curses grew less, and then ceased; once again the man raised himself and looked forlornly about him, then his hand went again to his breast. This time it was a small packet which he drew forth and laid upon his knee, and the watcher saw him take from it a golden hoop, far too small for his big, bony fingers, and hold it so that it gleamed in the morning sun. Gazing upon it with what seemed almost like tenderness, he sighed and seemed about to press it to his lips. Then his rage burst forth again: he sprang to his feet, and with a sudden, wild gesture, flung the glittering thing over the rocky ledge, and watched it disappear in the black water below. Then he flung himself down again, the packet clutched in his hand, his face buried in the moss, and for long moments he might have been a dead man he was so still.

Sitting hidden among the bushes, with a trailing

poisonous ivy drooping just above his head, Jermyn grew restless and filled with a desire to move. Then from across the river a shrill whistle cleft the stillness, and from the west came the low whirr and rumble of the morning express bound for Roseville. Under cover of the increasing noise he arose and sought a place yet nearer the mossy ledge, where he could stand erect behind the thicket that formed the boundary between the rocky platform and the sloping bank; there, peering between two ivy-wreathed saplings only a little higher than his head, he could see the rock and its silent occupant lying scarce a dozen feet away.

More minutes passed with no movement and no sound save the roar of the train, passing now upon the other side. On it rushes, dashing by with a shriek, and sending back long plumes of white smoke, and still the man upon the rock lies prone upon his face.

"If he were to rise now," thinks Jermyn, as the train rushes past, "he could be seen over there; let us wait."

Soon the train has disappeared around a curve, with a muffled farewell roar, and then the prostrate man stirs, rises wearily, and then turns toward the watcher a face so ghastly, so hopeless, so set and desperate, that Jermyn, cold-blooded and self-controlled as he is, starts and causes the branch against which his hand has rested to rustle and bend beneath its weight. But he does not heed the sound. He is deaf to all but his own misery.

"Let us end it," he says slowly, with calmness almost, and without a glance to right or left he walks again to the edge of the rock and looks down. Standing so, with bent head, he puts a hand to his hip, and the watcher can see his lips move. A moment he stands thus; it would almost seem as if he were muttering a prayer.

And now there is a sound behind him, faint it is true, but very audible to the watcher, who looks toward the

wood from whence it came. The other does not change his position; he is lost to all save his own woe now.

What Jermyn sees causes him to start again. Upon the the bridle-path, at an opening in the trees, stands a horse, black and glistening when the sun's rays strike his well-groomed sides, and upon his back a woman—a girl, dark-eyed and lovely, clad in a habit so picturesque one might well look to see the hooded hawk upon her wrist; a moment he gazes wondering, then the look of horror in her dark eyes, and the cry that breaks from her lips causes him to turn.

The man upon the ledge has turned half around with his weight poised above the black water, and jagged rocks below, and is pressing a pistol to his temple.

"Joe!"

The man stands, his hand arrested, with the finger pressing upon the trigger; looks, sees the black horse bound forward, takes a step toward it and away from the rock's edge and deliberately fires.

But he does not fall, and in another moment she has sprung from her saddle and snatched the weapon from his hand.

E. Percy Jermyn is not a coward, and he stands self-arrested, in the very act of springing from his covert to wrest the pistol from the hand of the would-be self-slayer, but the girl has been before him, and now he draws back. He has no desire to mix himself up in this drama in the woods, and he sees that, for the moment at least, the danger is past.

"But I will see it out," he assures himself, "unseen if possible." He settles himself again and peers out upon the two.

"Joe Larsen," says the girl, her voice sweet but cold, "what were you about to do? Is *this* what you asked me here to see?"



The man's head had sunk upon his breast, all the fire, all the bitterness, had died out of his face; he looked abashed, humbled.

"I could not bear it," he said gaspingly. "The suspense was too much. I thought you were not coming, and I had sworn"—he lifted his head and looked her in the face suddenly, while a sullen light came into his eyes—"you know what I have sworn."

"Oh yes, I know what you have sworn!" There was fire in her eyes, and contempt in her voice. "You have sworn that I shall have no peace in my home. That unless I consent to be your wife I shall *have* no home. You have sworn to persecute me, and you *have* persecuted me, until you have driven me almost as mad as yourself. Bah!" she struck her dainty foot upon the rock and smote her hands together in an excess of fury; "what instinct is it that makes us fools? why did I rush to snatch this pistol?" She had flung the weapon down, and now she spurned it with her foot. "Why did your aunt meddle with your weapons? It seems there is *not* room enough in this world for you and I. I am tired of your persecutions, Joe Larsen! Great heavens! *why* did you write me to meet you here to-day; and why did I *come*?"

She flung out her hands in an angry gesture, moved a pace back and leaned against the side of her beautiful horse, clinching and unclenching her little gloved hands.

"Don't come nearer," she hissed; "say what you have to say, for it's your last chance! you have driven me to desperate measures."

The sight of her anger had seemed to allay his own. He seemed to have controlled himself, but the fire smoldered in his eyes, and his fingers clutched each other convulsively.

"And that means—Old March?"

"It means Mr. March."

"Bertha, listen to me! Tell me why have you changed so? What have I done? You were my promised wife for two long years; you have worn my ring; see, I have your letters. Tell me what has changed you?" He uttered these words slowly like one who held back his temper by force. The blood came and went in his face; his voice was harsh and broken. Looking at him with a scientist's interest in human nature, Jermyn said to himself:

"That man is ready to embrace her or to murder her."

"Why? What? I will tell you then—we will go over the old ground once more." She lifted her small right hand and held it heavenward. "Joe Larsen, I call God to witness my words. If I had given you my word as a *woman*, the word of a woman, I would keep that word at any cost. You and I were children together, playmates, I had no other; when I promised you that I would be your wife I was fourteen and you were twenty, I was a child and you seemed a boy to me still. Then I went away to school. Two years passed and I came home and saw you again. Do you want to hear how I *felt* when I saw you, and realized what my childish promise meant? Was I not honest with you then?"

He groaned and turned his face away. "Cruelly honest," he said.

"I told you the truth. I *could* not love you. I asked to be released. I could have been your friend for the old time's sake. But you would not hear me, there was no generosity in your nature. It was nothing to you that your happiness must come at the expense of mine! You would not release me, and when I declared that I would *have* my freedom, you threatened your life and mine! You let loose that hideous temper! You turned yourself into a madman. Since that time what a life I have led! Haunted, pursued by you, groveling one day, threat-

ening the next, driving away my friends, making my existence hateful! I tell you I am *tired* of it all! Do you think I *want* to marry that old man—?"

"*Bertha!* Then why—"

"Hush! let me finish! Because it is the *least* of two evils. With him I can at least have *peace*. With *you* life would be a hell. Bah! I wonder if you know how *tired* I am of all this. You have made me hate my very existence!" She flung the bridle from the hand that had been clinched upon it and began to pace to and fro across the mossy rock:

"Jove," thought Jermyn watching her with growing admiration. "How lovely she, is and how she hates that man! If he is desperate she is reckless; she is ripe for anything!"

"Bertha," said Larsen still in that same constrained tone, "you must not marry that man. If you will promise me that—"

She wheeled upon him fiercely—

"I will promise you *nothing*," she cried. "NOTHING I tell you. Promises! and to *you*! How many times have you left *me* promising, *swearing* never to renew this miserable subject; and how many times have you broken *your* word! Only last week you took a frightful oath. You would leave the country, you would never persecute me again, and to-day I receive—*this* " She snatched a tiny note from her belt and held it out toward him with a contemptuous gesture. You '*must* see me once more,' it says. Unless I meet you here I will hear of that which will make me regret my refusal to come till my latest day, and you call it a '*last request*'—Brutal!—monster to the last! did you *invite* me here to see you put a bullet through your head?"

Larsen had been gathering himself up, lashed by the sting of her words. His head was erect once more, and



the great veins stood out upon his temples. Once again the dangerous light was in his eye. With one stride he placed himself directly before her, facing her with folded arms.

"You say you are tired of this," he said between his teeth. "I am tired of it too. *That* is why I sent for you. I wanted to make one more effort, and I had determined, if I failed *this* time, to end it as I should have done if you had not come—almost too late—I asked you to come at seven, and I thought you had failed me."

"Indeed!" she sneered.

"This is what I wanted to say—to ask. You have said, I have heard you say it often, that you hated the country, you hated a farmer's life."

"I do!" flashed she.

"And *that* was one of your reasons for refusing me."

"One of the *least*."

"It never occurred to you that I might leave the farm. Bertha, you have longed for the city and its gayeties. Marry me and I will sell the farm, I will take all that is mine and we will go to the city; I can do something there. You shall have a home such as you long for. You can use your own money just as you please. Let us leave this place. I swear you shall live as you will—only be my wife. I will never interfere with your pleasures. I only want *you*."

The girl laughed scornfully.

"And if I refuse?"

He lifted his hand in a sudden fierce gesture. "You say I have broken many promises. But I will *not* break this one: If you marry that man I *will kill him*, and I will kill myself. I swear it; a moment ago, in my desperation, I was ready to fling away my life; I will never live without you. But, before I go, I will kill the man

who fills the place which is rightfully mine; if you marry that man you *sign his death-warrant*."

This time there was no laughter, and through the ivy leaves Jermyn could see that her face was ghastly pale.

"Ah," said her tormentor. "I see! you believe me, *this time*."

"Yes, Joseph Larsen, I believe you; why should I not, when I know you capable of all manner of baseness? of everything but generosity! Why am *I* not included in your list of victims?"

"Don't tempt me; don't goad me too far."

"Listen to me, sir, and don't fancy that I *fear* for myself. No man shall become a sacrifice for me. You have gone too far. Since I must, I must—I shall be neither *your* wife nor *his*. I will act upon your suggestion; but I will go alone!" She turned and placed a hand upon her saddle as if to mount.

"*Stop!*" he fairly howled seizing her by the arm. "What do you mean? *tell me!*" He shook her as if she were a reed in his fierce grasp.

Swift as a flash she turned upon him. Her anger had broken bounds, and a tiny pistol flashed in the sunlight almost touching his brow.

"Take away your hands," she cried, "*instantly—instantly!* Fool, did you think I would come here unarmed, knowing *you*? Ah," as his hand fell away from her arm. "*My* weapon is loaded by my own hand. Stand out of my way, Joe Larsen; you have persecuted me enough! Do your *worst*. I will never *see* you, never *speak* to you from this day."

Again she turned toward her horse, but he sprang before her.

"Not yet!" he hissed. "You say you will go away and alone. I say you *shall not!* Do you think you can escape me like that? *Go* if you will! you can not go





A TINY PISTOL FLASHED IN THE SUNLIGHT, ALMOST TOUCHING HIS BROW.—Slender Clue, p. 74.





where I will not follow! there! mount your horse; go where you choose! I will follow you to the world's end; escape me *if you can.*"

Without a word she turned and walked to the edge of the rock; standing there for so long that the man became impatient, her face turned riverward, the little pistol still in her hand; then she turned and came toward him.

"Joe," she said, in a strangely altered tone, "you and I must end this matter in some way; you are spoiling my life—"

"And you have spoiled mine—"

She made an impatient gesture.

"Drop heroics if you can, and listen. If I must give up my marriage I shall have to leave Upton; and if I *must* choose between you as companion or—shadow—"

She caught her breath, and struck her foot fiercely upon the rock beneath it.

"Go!" she cried. "Leave me in peace for an hour. I want to be alone! I want to think! Go, I say! Unless you do, I will end all here and now." She lifted the little pistol and the man cried out:

"Stop Bertha! I will go if you will promise—"

"I promise to give you an answer—of some sort—in *one hour*; now go—go! and mind you do not spy upon me! Go to the farm and tell Susan that I shall not come home till noon. In an hour you will find me here."

For a long moment he looked at her in silence. Then—

"Promise me not to leave this spot," he said, "and I will go to Susan, and will not spy upon you. At least Bertha Warham, *I* have never *lied* to you."

"I promise," she said between her teeth, and turned her face toward the water.

When she turned back again he was gone, and tears

were coursing down her cheeks. "Oh," she cried, clinching her hands and tossing them aloft, "if he had not gone I should have killed him or flung myself from off that ledge. Curse him! Oh, *how* I *hate* him! What have I done that I must be so beset. Oh if something—if *someone* could show me a path to freedom, anything, *anything!*" Again her hands went out in a wild gesture, and then the tears began to flow and sobs to shake her frame. "Oh!" she sobbed, dropping her head upon her hands. "For help! for help!"

There was a rustling of the bushes near at hand and she sprang back with the little pistol clinched and half-upraised.

Before her stood, not Joe Larsen, but a stranger, with a handsome blonde face and courtly manner.

"Pardon me," he said in his low cultured tone; "I have chanced to be a witness to all that has passed here. You are in distress. Let me help you. I am a stranger in Roseville, a student; I came to the village for quiet and that I might study. Will you let me talk with you? You have my sympathy. If you will, you shall have my aid. Let me give you my card." She took the card and read thereon the name "*E. Percy* written in pencil. She gazed at him intently for a moment's space. Then her old daring came back, and she met his overture with a reckless frankness.

"If you have heard *all*, you know that I have but one little hour in which to decide my fate. Advice cannot help me. It is a *problem* that I must solve."

"And that problem?" he fell in with her abrupt mood, but kept his gentle deprecating tone, "may I hear it?"

"How else can you help me? It is this: how may I escape, first from my husband that was to be, from my guardian and step-mother, and, last and most difficult, from Joe Larsen? Can you tell me how?" She threw



back her beautiful head and looked him full in the face "I was never called a coward," she went on, "but I *do* fear that man I believe he meant all that he has said."

"And so do I."

"Then you see my position. I cannot marry a kind old man and put his life in danger. If I refuse him I shall quarrel with my guardian, who is set upon this match; even if there were no Joseph Larsen, I could not remain at home and endure his rages, and the taunts and sneers of my step-mother. If I go out into the world alone, I shall be more than ever at the mercy of Joe Larsen. There," she finished bitterly, "*that* is my position; *can* you help me?"

"I can," he said firmly, "and with your consent and co-operation, I will." He held out his hand but she kept her eyes fixed upon his face, and, ignoring the extended palm, asked:

"How?"

He dropped the hand and drew himself a trifle more erect.

"As a gentleman may, and can," he answered with dignity. "*Only* thus: you are cruelly placed and I long to aid you. But—you must trust me, and you must let me ask you some questions that may sound strangely."

"Oh!" she caught at the tiny watch hidden away in her velvet bodice. "How fast the time is flying," she said hurriedly. "Here's my hand, sir. Ask what you will."

"Thanks. First then, we will suppose that you are about to flee, and that all is ready. Tell me, are you prepared financially? you will need money, and I—"

"Stop;" she cried. "Let us settle this. I have fifteen thousand dollars in my own right from my mother. It was put into the care of my guardian. The money

to come into my hands thus:—five thousand dollars when I became eighteen; that was a year ago—almost. The remainder, when I was married, or, in any case, at twenty-one; much was left to my guardian's discretion. When I was eighteen, he built a new house, and I used a part of my five thousand to fit up my own room after my own fancy. When the day of my marriage was set, the balance, over ten thousand dollars was paid into my hands. My guardian is an eccentric man. 'Here is your dower, Bertha, take it and let your future husband hold it in trust for you,' he said. The money is in my desk; twelve thousand in all. I am not in need of money, Mr. Jermyn."

"For your sake I am glad. But were it otherwise, I could have been your banker, for a more modest sum—that is. Once more; will your going be too great a blow to your friends?"

"My guardian, as I have said, is eccentric, wrapped up in himself. I have no reason to think that he would regret me deeply or long;" she spoke bitterly. "The old man whose wife I was to be, is too staid, too formal and proper, to grieve overmuch; my step-mother will rejoice, and exert herself to console my father. The one soul who will sincerely regret me is Susan, good prim old maid that she is! a distant relative who exchanges faithful services and caustic speeches for a none too cheerful home among us. As for Larsen—we will not speak of him."

"We need not. Another thing; when you go, shall you leave an explanation behind you? Or shall it be a flitting, shrouded in mystery; consider well. You *may* wish to return."

"I had not thought of that." She was silent for a long moment.

"Advise me," she said. "Time flies."

"You wish above all things to escape from this fellow, Larsen?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Then why not *disappear*? Why let blame attach to yourself?"

"What do you mean?"

"This: You must have an assistant whom you can trust. You must leave your room in disorder. Make it look like a case of abduction, or perhaps, robbery. Instead of denouncing you, leave them regretting you; Larsen among the rest."

"But how, *how*? Quick! the hour is almost gone; have you a definite plan?"

"By to-morrow I *shall* have one."

"And Joe Larsen! he will come soon, *what* shall I say to him? Quick! someone is coming! *Tell me.*" She made a movement toward her horse, and Jermyn sprang back and half-buried himself among the vines.

"Tell him," he said in a sibilant half-whisper, "that if he will obey you in everything, *and keep your secret*, you will go with him to the city."

"*What!* are you mad or mocking me?"

"Neither. Trust me. Tell him this, and make him your tool. I know *you* can act your part. For the rest meet me here to-morrow. I will make all clear to you."

Again he put out his hand and she laid her own within it. In another moment Joseph Larsen's hulking form came into sight, hastening down the bridle path.

Setting her teeth and clinching her hand about the little riding-whip, Bertha sprang to her saddle and rode to meet him.

When both were out of sight, Jermyn came out again upon the rock, looked about him until he found a suitable stone, took from his pocket a fish-line, and tied it fast to the weight. Then he lay down and lowered the



stone slowly into the water lying so dark and still about the jagged rocks.

"Deep!" he muttered. "Deeper than I thought; *deep enough!*" He got up and threw away the stone.

"My friend Larsen," he soliloquized, "*you* are a fool! It is only a fool who breathes his threatenings *aloud*;" he wound up his line and went back to his jaunty boat. "Another day," he said to himself, as he took up his oars. "I must investigate this place further;" he dipped his oars, and his lips shut in a straight, thin line. His eyes were half closed after a fashion habitual to him when thinking deeply, but they lost nothing going on about him.

His brow was bent until a tiny wrinkle marred the easy suavity usual to his face. And all the way to Roseville the wrinkle held its place. But as he came in sight of the village and opposite the carriage drive beside the river, the face relaxed—the wrinkle disappeared.

"It has been a lucky morning," he murmured as he turned his boat shoreward. "I begin to think that I have really fallen upon my feet."

## CHAPTER VIII

### IN PREPARATION

"I have had an adventure," said Mr. Jermyn, entering Brian's office late in the afternoon, so late indeed, that he found the editor alone, and, for once, unoccupied.

"An adventure—in Roseville"?

"Not quite. And really it was not *my* adventure. It was the adventure, drama or tragedy, as it may turn out, of a young lady. Do your country lovers usually meet in dingy dells, and threaten each other?"

"Well, not *always*. Have a cigar, and may it make you communicative. Will it do for an item?"

Jermyn smiled as he accepted a cigar.

"How prosaic. But you shall judge. Imagine me half a dozen miles down the river at an early hour this morning, armed with a book or two, my boat moored, myself seated in a thicket, shaded and sheltered; the river at my feet and a huge table-like rock, moss-covered and towering above the river, at my left hand."

"Death Rock, eh?"

"Is *that* its name? and why Death Rock?"

"Because it is said that long ago, an Indian maiden, to escape her white pursuers, sprang from it and was drowned in the deep pool below."

"Is it then so deep?"

"It is very deep, just there; besides, it is said there is a subterranean stream far down, with a strong suction. The Indian maiden, so says tradition, although she was *seen* to make the leap, was never found. But come,

you were near the Rock, what happened? Did you see the Indian maiden?"

"Worse. I saw a meeting between two who had been lovers. They had quarreled and there seems to have been a rival; I heard some very stormy words, and judged myself *de trop*. I heard the man swear to kill his rival and then himself, unless she at once discarded that rival. His *look* was horrible, and his manner that of a madman. It was no ordinary lovers' quarrel. I am inclined to believe the fellow was capable of all he threatened to do."

"Describe him," said Brian.

"Big, swarthy, with coarse black hair, fierce dark eyes, smooth-shaven, and with a heavy jaw and cruel mouth; he moved with an habitual droop of the shoulders, and his manner was as uncouth as his tones were deep and harsh. She called him—Joe. Perhaps you know him?"

"I recognize him from the description. It must have been a fellow named Joe Larsen. He lives at, or near, Upton, some twelve miles away. It is not in our county, and I seldom visit the place. And the lady?"

"I can only say that she was graceful and spirited, with a charming voice. His superior, I should think."

"Larsen has an unsavory reputation and a beastly temper. I once heard of his killing a fine saddle-horse in the most brutal manner in one of his rages. He has some money and a few more or less influential friends. But for this he would be outcast from all society. I have heard that he was engaged to a beautiful girl, the daughter of an eccentric farmer. How did the quarrel end?"

"That I cannot tell—she seemed defiant, and she taunted him as only a woman can."

"If *my* sister had been threatened by a man like that," said Brian soberly, "I should not dare let her out of my



sight. If anyone gets hurt over there, I shall hint to the sheriff to look after Larsen."

"I trust nothing will happen, at least," smiling again; "don't add to *my* notoriety by using *my* name when you report to the sheriff."

"You shall be spared." Brian swung himself about, facing his desk and took up a slip of paper. By the bye, here is something more agreeable to be discussed."

"What is that?"

"The Hills are alive once more. The Barings have returned."

"Oh!" indifferently.

"Yes indeed. And this may prove a respite to you. Roseville will have more than *one* aristocrat to talk about and adore, at a distance. This morning, we of the valley awoke to a knowledge of a change upon the Hills and this is the item which must appear in our next issue. Listen it is *very* eloquent."

"Mrs. Jacob Baring, and the daughters of John Baring Esq. have returned from their season in Philadelphia, much sooner than was expected, and with them have come a bevy of fair guests. Two nieces of Mrs. Jacob Baring, two sisters, the school friends of the nieces, Linette and Lotta Baring, and Miss Ellen Jernyngham of Philadelphia, the orphan heiress of the late well-known and widely esteemed banker, Theodore E. Jernyngham. It is expected that there will be much gayety this summer upon the hills."

Mr. Jermyn's face was expressive of quiet amusement, when Brian put down the written slip and turned toward him.

"An orphan and an heiress," he repeated still smiling. "What happiness for Roseville. Do you chance to know this great lady?"

"Alas! no. Seriously, they say that she is very hand-

some, very haughty, enormously rich; her own mistress and perfectly heart free."

Again came that careless half-laugh, "*Enormously* rich. Pardon me, Brian, but we English have such a different scale of values from yours; now what, for example, do you mean in this case by, 'enormously rich?'"

"In the case of Miss Jernyngham, I mean something more than a half-million. Roseville thinks that immense, I assure you."

"No doubt." Jermyn waved away the subject with a smile and a gesture, and began to discuss the beauties of nature about Roseville as if there were no place in his scheme of life for the beauties of the Hills.

Nevertheless, when he was alone in his room that night he closed a long soliloquy by some queer remarks to his own face as he stood before his small mirror in Mrs. Bates' "best bedroom."

"I really think I *have* fallen upon my feet," he murmured comfortably. "Who would have thought it—of Roseville." And after another long look at his handsome blonde reflection in the mirror, he added enigmatically: "Ten thousand—half a million! Well, well!" He turned and began to pace his small room, evidently pondering deeply.

"I think," he murmured presently, "I think I must explore that underground stream," and then, a moment later, "She must not go yet—not yet. Not for some weeks. It would be too soon."

Meantime, upon the Hills, the presence of Mr. Jermyn in Roseville had made its impression. They were sitting or sauntering upon Jacob Baring's fine lawn, the merry Hill party, when the news first came up for discussion. There were the two Barings, Linette and Lotta, the Sutherland sisters, the two Roosevelts and Ellen Jernyngham the heiress.

"How absurd!" said the eldest Miss Rooseveltdt, loftily, and casting a contemptuous glance down upon the pretty village outspread beneath them, all unconscious of her condemnation. "How *can* people—even *these* people—be so ready to take up a stranger who comes among them with a story so improbable."

"My poor dear, you don't know Roseville," began Lotta Baring, bowing her head slightly to conceal the mirthful gleam in her pretty blue eyes; "now *we* being Rosevillians—"

"*We*," interrupted Linette, "*we* Lotta?"

"You and I, sister. Only you and I. You *are* a Rosevillian are you not?"

"Well," assented the elder sister, "I suppose I am, under protest. Go on, Miss. You left off—"

"Just when I am about to begin, Lin—pray give me the floor."

"Hear, hear!" cried Ruth and Lillian Sunderland, with a unanimity often observable in sisters of nearly the same age; and Grace Rooseveltdt lifted herself from the hammock where she had been idly swinging, and turned a face of exaggerated gravity upon Lotta.

"Miss Lotta Baring has the floor," she said, with a flourish of her white hand.

"I was about to say," began Lotta, "that we Rosevillians, lacking the opportunities that you ladies enjoy, ought to be held excusable if we *sometimes* mistake a pebble for a diamond. How are *we* to know—"

"Lotta," said Miss Rooseveltdt reprovingly, "why *do* you say *we*? Surely *you* do not class yourself with these village aristocrats."

"My dear," retorted Lotta, "you don't realize our position. Lin and I are in a measure at the mercy of these 'village aristocrats;' do we not pass at least eight months out of the year among them? How are we to



enliven these months if we may not utilize that which is at hand? Really there are a few people in Roseville who are not so bad."

Linette and Ruth Sunderland exchanged glances, and Lillian laughed outright.

"I think I have heard something of the sort," commented Grace Roosevelt with a meaning in her tone that caused Lotta to blush rosily.

"If you begin to be personal," she cried springing to her feet, "I am done with you—unworthy descendants of Vere De Vere."

Another gush of laughter followed her as she moved across the lawn, and approached a rustic bench where sat a young lady quite oblivious of the group chatting near by, and absorbed in the perusal of a foreign looking volume.

She glanced up as Lotta sat down upon the bench beside her. It was an inquiring glance, with a shade of surprise in it, an unsmiling glance but full of dignified toleration.

"I have not come to interrupt your reading, Miss Jernyngham," said Lotta carelessly, "only to escape from those undignified chatterers."

Miss Jernyngham laid down her book and smiled, a slightly sarcastic smile.

"Are they undignified?" she asked slowly.

"Horribly so," said Lotta bending down to pick up a dry twig. "For—*Philadelphians*."

Miss Jernyngham looked a trifle perplexed, and cast upon Lotta a glance of inquiry. But Lotta was looking innocently down at a dry twig, and her companion's face took on its look of lofty toleration.

"You are a queer child, Lotta," she said with a smile of patronage.

Lotta looked up, her face full of laughter.

"You don't mean just that," she said positively. "I lack dignity and repose; I am slightly flavored with rusticity—*Bourgeoise*, eh?"

"I believe that you choose to seem *bourgeoise*, child. You appear to take a perverse delight in claiming part and lot in this small community."

Again the color rushed to the laughing face, and the girl turned upon Miss Jernyngham a quick keen glance; but there was nothing in the calm face to indicate a hidden meaning in her words, and Lotta sighed and then laughed.

"What is amusing them, I wonder," said Miss Jernyngham, looking across at the group about the hammock, as a fresh burst of merriment greeted their ears. "Something has enlivened them."

"Girls—Lotta—Miss Jernyngham—come here, *do* come," cried the merry voices, and Miss Jernyngham arose slowly, gathered up the train of her watteau wrapper with one deft hand, and, holding her book in the other, looked down at Lotta.

"Shall we not go?" she asked slowly.

Lotta's sudden uprising was in direct contrast to her companion's slow grace.

"Oh of course!" she said, "but—I know what its all about." And together they joined the laughing group.

"Won't you sit in the hammock, Miss Jernyngham," said Grace Roosevelt, making a movement as if to abandon her place.

But Miss Jernyngham stopped her by a gesture.

"By no means, Miss Grace," she said. "I never sit in a hammock." And she seated herself upon a garden chair. "What were you discussing?"

"Miss Jernyngham," began Grace solemnly, "did you know that we have in our midst a *real live lord*?"

Miss Jernyngham started slightly and looked about her as if half-expecting to see the stranger.

"Explain," she said, with a touch of haughtiness.

"Grace does not quite mean that he is *here*, when she says "in *our* midst," explained Lotta, glancing maliciously at the occupant of the hammock. "She means—in the midst of Roseville."

Miss Jernyngham swept the group with an unsmiling glance and sat silent before them.

"Girls," said Lotta severely after a moment of silence, "Did you call us over here because you had anything to say?"

"Oh, we have *lots* to say!" replied Grace.

"Then for mercy's sake say it! are you all struck dumb?"

"It's our politeness," suggested Lillian Sutherland. "We don't want to supersede each other."

"Then," retorted Lotta seating herself at the foot of an oak tree, "perhaps you would better all speak at once."

Miss Jernyngham took up her book and began to finger the pages listlessly.

"Miss Linette Baring," said Grace, casting, as she spoke, a furtive glance in the direction of Miss Jernyngham, "will *you* introduce the subject?"

"Ahem! ladies," began Linette, her glance following that of Grace, "we were discussing a lawn party."

"A *lawn* party!" cried Lotta disdainfully. "*Nothing* but a *lawn* party. Was all this mystery, all these side glances about a mere lawn party?"

"But this is not to be a *mere* lawn party, Lot," ventured her sister.

"No," said Lillian Sunderland, "it's to be a special lawn party."

"A—what!"

"Provided," broke in Grace, "our plan meets with the approval of all present."



"Oh!" ejaculated Lotta, immediately retiring within herself, while Miss Jernyngham laid down her book and said with her most tolerant look:

"Pray tell us your plans?"

"They are hardly developed into plans yet, but of course we are in search of amusement; we want all that we can get." Linette looked over at Grace, who nodded encouragingly, and then gave her swaying hammock a fresh impetus. "So we thought of a lawn party—to which we will invite all of the Rosevillians, *including*—here she paused and seemed to nerve herself for the finale, "*including—the British Lion.*"

"Oh!" cried Lotta, "that's your fine plot. I should like to know how you expect to get him, not having the honor of his acquaintance.

"Charley Brian knows him," suggested Lillian.

"Oh! you are well informed."

"And," added Linette slyly, "of course we shall invite Charley."

"Lin," said Lotta, turning suddenly upon her sister, "if Charley Brian believes this person to be an *impostor*, he won't bring him here."

"Who is this Mr. Brian?" interposed Ruth Sunderland, speaking for almost the first time.

Lotta Baring looked vexed and turned her head away; but Grace Roosevelt came to the rescue.

"Charlie Brian," she said, "is the editor of the county paper. I met him here last summer, and let me tell you, he is *not* a Rosevillian; the Brians have good blood and breeding; *they* are worth knowing."

"You say the Brians," interposed Miss Jernyngham languidly. "There are others?"

"There is one other. Rene Brian, a sister; the prettiest, wittiest, *jolliest* girl—"

"*Grace!*" cried Miss Roosevelt; "that *adious* word!"

"It's a good word," declared Grace, subsiding into her hammock. "I like it."

"So do I," cried Lotta, casting defiant glances about her.

"I think," said Miss Jernygham, with a touch of haughtiness in her tone, "that we would better return to the lawn party."

"So do I," agreed Miss Rooseveltdt, with a very good imitation of Miss Jernyngham's manner.

"Then," said Linette, "let me put the question fairly. They are having a revel in the valley, glorying in the society of the son of an English nobleman, while we—we sit on the hills and sigh for new worlds to conquer; now it is our custom to give, every summer, a fete to the people of the village. Last year Aunt Jacob gave the fete, this year it is our turn. All Roseville will be invited, and why may we not amuse ourselves by asking with the rest, this grand *seigneur*, who, as a matter of course, is an impostor, just to see how easily the village critics *can* be duped. It is not quite *time* for our annual fete, but the weather is so charming that we can afford to hurry matters a trifle. What do you think of the plan? Wait. *Don't* all speak at once; I will poll the witnesses. Miss—a—Miss Rooseveltdt, you know something of these fetes; what do you think of including among our guests this—"

"British Lion," supplemented Lotta quickly.

"This British Lion then; what is your vote, Miss Rooseveltdt?"

Miss Rooseveltdt was tall, plump, florid; she dressed richly and spoke seldom; she was called a stately young woman and her discreet silence gave weight to the impression. She lifted her eyes with a languid glance and said:

"It's of no consequence—to me. I—have no objections."

"Miss Jernyngham," called Linette briskly, "now for your verdict."

Miss Jernyngham looked slightly bored but very tolerant.

"I suppose he will compare favorably with the rest," she said slowly. "Since you must have the others, his presence may serve as a spice to the occasion."

"That's *nice*, Miss Jernyngham. Now Miss Sunderland—Ruth—let us hear *you*."

Miss Sutherland was small, pale and quiet, and inclined to be indulgent to the gayer ones.

"I shall not object," she said smiling; "you must be amused I see—at someone's expense."

"Ruthie you are a darling," cried Linette; now Lillian."

"The fete of course. The Lion by all means."

"Good! Now Grace."

"The Lion, the Lion, the Lion."

"I knew it! You Lotta?"

To the surprise of all, Lotta Baring turned toward them a sober face.

"I approve of the fete," she said, "but repudiate the Lion."

"Lotta Baring!" from Linette.

"You!" from Grace, incredulously.

"Yes, I! Oh, you will *have* him of course, but I wash my hands of him. No British Lion, sham or real, for me."

"But it's settled," cried Lillian, "we are to have the Lion, Lotta."

"Oh, it's settled, of course! I'm only a very small minority. I wish you joy of him, girls."

A stately elderly woman came sweeping across the lawn toward them, and Grace Roosevelt lifted a warning finger.



"Here comes Aunt Jake, girls. Not a word about the Lion."

"Young ladies," called Mrs. Baring, "are you coming to luncheon?"

Instantly the group broke up and by twos and threes sauntered toward the house, Mrs. Baring pausing until Miss Jernyngham approached and walked beside her.

Ellen Jernyngham was that unfortunate among women, a wealthy orphan, with an absent and long-estranged half-brother for her only relative. He had left his home and hers in a fit of pique when a mere boy, and for many years there came no word or sign from him. She did not know whether he was still an inhabitant of this world or had passed on to another. Becoming her own mistress at an early age, she had grown from girlhood into young womanhood in an atmosphere of selfishness, pride, and frivolity. She was a Jernyngham of the Jernynghams, nurtured in the pride of birth, taught to look down upon those who lacked a pedigree. At sixteen she was motherless and the mistress of her father's splendid mansion; at eighteen she was deposed and a young step-mother reigned in her stead; at twenty-one she was an orphan and the mistress of a handsome fortune.

She was slender and graceful, with the grace that comes from thorough training. Her face was fair and would have been beautiful but for its soullessness. She was not lacking in elegance and refinement and had inherited a vein of sentiment strangely at variance with the pride that was her strongest attribute.

She was not a favorite among the young ladies at the Hills, but they stood somewhat in awe of her biting speeches as well as of her fine air of tolerance for their littleness, which, as Lotta Baring confidentially informed Linette, was merely refined superciliousness. Miss Roosevelt, the elder, however, was a stanch satellite

and a ready imitator, for although her own blood was as blue, and her papa's purse as long, as was Miss Jernyngham's, nature had endowed her with these qualities that make it easier to imitate than to originate, and who more worthy, as a model, than the haughty Miss Jernyngham?

Ruth Sunderland, too, admired the orphan heiress in a quiet awe-stricken way; but Lillian, Grace, and the Baring sisters, while they appreciated this splendid addition to their party, did not share in the awe nor yet the admiration.

"Were you not surprised at Miss Jernyngham's attitude this afternoon?" asked Linette Baring of her sister that evening, when they were alone in the privacy of their mutual dressing-room.

Lotta turned quickly toward her sister with a hair-brush poised in her hand.

"Lin," she said impressively, "don't you know that, in spite of her pride and her lofty airs, Ellen Jernyngham would be the gladdest one among us, if this adventurer should turn out to be what he pretends. When she gave her answer, she was half wishing, or thinking or hoping, that he *might* be the real son of a real lord, after all."

Linette shook out her long brown locks and seemed to meditate.

"I don't think she has had many offers," she finally said, as if offering a suggestion.

"I know she has not," said Lotta decidedly.

"You are always so positive, Lot."

"Well, why should I not be? It's not every young man that can offer her anything that she would deem worth the taking. I heard her say once that she could not marry a man of low birth were he ever so perfect, nor a man of gentle birth were he not in manner and appear-

ence what a man of blue blood should be—morally, and physically, and mentally perfect."

"Umph!" ejaculated Linette. Did anybody ever see such a man?"

Lotta blushed, but met her sister's eye without flinching.

"Yes," she said firmly, "there are such men."

"Lot," said Linette wickedly, "if you think you have found such a man, don't let Miss Jernyngham into the secret. He is probably the last of his kind."



## CHAPTER IX

### IN WHICH THE LION ROARS

The projected fete at the Hills soon became a fixed fact, and the talk of the town. Invitations flew about, and all Roseville was in a flutter.

"I have another invitation for you," said Charlie Brian, coming one morning into Mr. Jermyn's "sitting-room," at the Roseville House.

Mr. Jermyn lifted his eyes from his book.

"Another?" he said. "I thought we had been the rounds, Brian. Will they never shift this burden from your shoulders?"

"My shoulders carry *this* off very well," laughed Brian; "it's from the Hills."

"The Hills? I beg your pardon! sit down, Brian."

The Hills. It's a *fete* or lawn party at Mr. John Baring's."

"The father of the pretty daughters?"

The young editor flushed slightly.

"The same," he said.

Since the day when Brian had read to him the "item" chronicling the arrival of the ladies at the Hills, weeks had passed, but the subject had never been renewed between them. Now, however, Mr. Jermyn closed the book he had been reading and placing it upon the table beside him, said negligently:

"There are still guests at the Hills I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Have you chanced to meet them?"

"Ah—yes. That is—I met the Misses Rooseveltdt last summer, and only last night was presented to the Misses Sunderland, and—Miss Jernyngham."

"The heiress, ah! and you found them charming—of course?"

Brian laughed.

"I found them very stately—especially Miss Jernyngham."

"Does that mean that she was haughty, cold, or—"

"Oh she was gracious enough, but *cold!* yes, as uplifted as a glacier. I should say it might be hard to guess which she prizes most, her fortune, or her race."

"Brian!" said the other, with one of his slow smiles, "I cannot attend the fete."

"I am sorry for that," said the young editor regretfully. "I had thought or hoped that the society at the Hills might in a measure compensate you for some of the things you have endured under my chaperonage in the past few weeks—that is—if you cared for society at all."

Mr. Jermyn clasped and unclasped his fingers gently, while he looked thoughtfully into the face of his visitor.

"I am not—averse to society—of the right sort," he said slowly, "and this no doubt is of the right sort. But rather than be misunderstood—I must deprive myself of the pleasure of meeting the ladies of the Hills."

"I don't think that I follow you," said Brian wrinkling his brows.

Mr. Jermyn unclasped his hands and let them rest upon the arms of his chair.

"Don't you see, Brian, that the news of my parentage and all of the stuff that Mrs. Brace has exploited about the village, must, as news flies here, have reached the ladies at the Hills long before this; and that hearing it, I must appear to them as either a fool or an impostor? It will seem to them that I have ostentatiously published

myself, blazoned forth my family history, my birth, my future prospect, as so much capital to trade upon. If *you* have been bidden to this fete it is because of your personal worth and their friendly regard for you. I, a stranger, am bidden as a curiosity—something to amuse. I can see how I must appear to those who do not know the truth, so, Brian, I must decline this invitation, although to accept it, if I could go as you go, would give me pleasure."

Charlie Brian pondered for a moment.

"I think," he said, "that in justice to you, I ought to explain to the Barings—to tell them, I mean, just how you gained your unsought fame. My sister is a friend of the young ladies, and her knowledge of the facts would set you right in the eyes of all whom you would care to know."

"Possibly—possibly," said Mr. Jermyn. "But I don't like the idea of being set right, nor the necessity for justifying myself. However, if the truth will justify you in your friendship for me, you are at liberty to use it as you choose."

"Thanks, and I must convey your regrets to the Misses Baring."

"Yes, they are genuine regrets, too. I hope your fete will be in every way a success, Brian."

That *fete* was a success, so far as a faultless day, a fine orchestra brought from the city, a splendid luncheon, and the lovely summer toilets of the city guests could make it successful; but the village belles missed the lion who had been the chief ornament at all their recent social gatherings, and the ladies of the Hills missed the spice which the Englishman's presence was to have imparted to an otherwise common-place assemblage of guests.

"Linette," said Lotta Baring, the morning after the



fete, "hasten your toilet, *do*, while I go wake the girls. I want to be in Aunt Jake's breakfast-room the moment they are astir, with you all at my heels. I've got a bomb-shell to explode this morning, and I won't let it off until I have a full audience."

Linette turned lazily and looked at her sister.

"Better give me just a hint of it, Lot," she suggested.

"Not a word! not a sign! Oh, I promise it will wake you all up!"

Nothing more could be coaxed from Lotta's pursed up lips, but she wore an air of mighty mystery throughout the breakfast hour, and led the way across the lawn, and up to the door of her uncle's dwelling, with the air of a triumphant invader.

Jacob Baring had breakfasted and betaken himself to his daily vocations, but Mrs. Baring and the young ladies were still seated at the breakfast-table when Lotta and her curious followers entered.

"Don't ring, auntie! sit still, girls, you will need a bountiful breakfast," cried out Linette, at the first movement of the ladies about the table. "Lotta here has a revelation in store for us; we have all come together, that she may not be obliged to exhaust herself by repeating her story."

There was a chorus of laughing comment, a general settling down into listening attitudes, and then Mrs. Baring said:

"Don't keep us in suspense, Lotta, breakfast has lost its flavor."

"Go on!" urged Lillian Sunderland; "this uncertainty is dreadful."

"Oh, it's nothing after all," said Lotta after she had settled herself comfortably in her aunt's favorite easy chair—"only I have found out why the English nabob did not dance at our festival."

"Oh, Lotta!" cried Grace Roosevelt, and, "Have you *truly*?" asked Lillian breathlessly, while Miss Jernyng-ham laid down her fork and turned toward Lotta a look of inquiry.

"Girls," said Lotta solemnly, "I beg your pardon, auntie. *Ladies*, we—no—you—for I washed my hands of the business you will remember—you have made a monstrous blunder—the Vere De Veres have been less penetrating than the *Bourgeoise* of Roseville—Mr. Jermyn, the British Lion, stayed away from our *fete* because he was fully convinced that we looked upon him as an impostor, and had asked him solely to amuse ourselves."

"Umph!" sniffed Linette, "we will give him credit for his penetration."

"And he, no doubt, has already given you—no us—for, like poor Tray, I must be judged by the company I keep—he has given *us* credit for no end of vulgarity, and snobbishness, for listen, ladies, Mr. Jermyn is *not* an impostor, but the flesh and blood scion of nobility that he has been advertised," and Lotta launched at once into the story of Mrs. Brace and her officious meddlesomeness, telling of Rene Brian's part in the unearthing of Mr. Jermyn's family secrets, of Charlie Brian's subsequent interviews with him, and many other things that tended to make Mr. Jermyn appear to the mental vision of the ladies of the Hills quite a new individual.

"He went the Roseville rounds," finished the narrator, "solely to extricate Mr. Brian from the position into which, his tact told him, a country editor must be placed who is besieged by such a lot of unreasonable beings as the set that clamored for the acquaintance of an English gentleman who was the son of a baronet. He is very reserved, Mr. Brian says, and not at all inclined to push himself anywhere. Mr. Brian speaks of him in terms of highest praise."

A momentous silence pervaded the breakfast-room—a silence which the volatile Grace was first to break.

"Girls," she said looking slowly around her, "we *have* made a blunder."

"Have *we* not?" said Lotta, who seemed to enjoy the confusion she had wrought; "and now—what will *we* do about it?"

"Write him an apology signed by us all," suggested Linette.

"Challenge Miss Brian for not letting us into the secret before the fete," said Grace Roosevelt.

"I think," said Miss Jernyngham, severely, "that quite enough has been done, more perhaps than can be undone."

"It's too bad," echoed Miss Roosevelt. "I *knew* it must end badly."

"Did you?" asked her sister; "then why did you not give us the benefit of your wisdom at the right time?"

"Young ladies," interposed Mrs. Baring smiling indulgently upon the fluttering group, "I must insist upon your dropping all further proceedings. If Mr. Jermyn has been misunderstood it was not a very remarkable thing. If he is really what Mr. Brian represents him"—here Lotta flushed hotly—"we must find a way to convince him that *we* do not misjudge him. But no more plotting, my dears; leave the *future to me*."

When Linette and Lotta were alone again they discussed as usual the events of the day.

"We are safe enough to leave the Englishman to Aunt Jake!" said irreverent Lotta; "she will have him at her next luncheon; trust her for that."

"If she does," said Linette, "I know who will be more pleased than either you or I."

"Who?"



"Ellen Jernyngham. If he comes among us you will see her unbend to his Lordship."

"I don't know why she should not," said Lotta, "she is not so popular that she can afford to play iceberg much longer. Ellen Jernyngham is rich and well enough looking, but for all that she seems to be strangely unattractive or uninteresting."

"Most people *are* uninteresting," suggested her sister, 'who are so entirely absorbed in themselves. She's a regular Miss McBride.

'Pride in the head she carries so high,  
Pride on her lip, and pride in her eye.'

"She is

'Proud of her beauty, and proud of her pride,  
And proud of fifty matters beside,  
That never would bear inspection.' "

"Amen!" murmured Lotta sleepily, "spare me the rest, Linette."

## CHAPTER X

### IN WHICH BARRIERS GO DOWN

How Mrs. Jacob Baring, a woman of tact and resolution, combined with perfect confidence in herself, and a thorough knowledge of how to do a difficult thing gracefully, brought about the capitulation of Mr. Jermyn, need not be told.

Most of us have met the matron of tact, and know something of her methods.

It was done; and Mr. Jermyn, after just the right degree of reticence and dignified holding back, slipped naturally and gracefully into the niche proffered him and became a favored and welcome visitor at the Hills.

At first he came, and preferred to come, accompanied by the young editor; but, after a time, it became the usual thing to see him, almost daily, upon one of the two broad lawns for an hour, or perhaps two, of the late summer afternoons; and Charlie Brian, emboldened perhaps by his example, came and went also, oftener and more independently.

If, upon his coming among them, Mr. Jermyn had a preference for any particular lady at the Hills, it would seem to have been Mrs. Jacob Baring, who enjoyed that preference, for it was her presence that he sought first and her grave and stately conversation that he seemed most to enjoy.

It could scarcely be said that he withdrew that preference—rather that he extended it, until gradually, almost

imperceptibly, Miss Jernyngham became the object of his unobtrusive regard.

This state of things might have been brought about by Mrs. Baring, for Miss Jernyngham was her favorite to the exclusion even of her own nieces. The Jernynghams and the Rooseveltdts—Mrs. Jacob Baring was once Miss Henrietta Rooseveldt—had been friends through more than a generation, and Ellen Jernyngham had all the pride, the hauteur, the style and the wealth that Mrs. Baring had seen and admired in her mother, and her grandmother before her.

When Mr. Jermyn began to seem dimly conscious of the superiority of her paragon, Mrs. Baring smiled approval, for, by this time, she was fully convinced that he was all that he claimed, or seemed to claim, to be.

"He has the *air noble*," she said to her favorite. "Did you ever see, while you were abroad, Ellen, a more perfect specimen of English aristocracy?"

Miss Jernyngham, after some reflection, confessed that she never did.

It seemed to the others quite natural that Mr. Jermyn should find an affinity in Miss Jernyngham.

"They are alike," declared Linette, "even in name; they are both pale and proud, and slow and silent—only—Mr. Jermyn does not carry his mere toleration of us commonplace mortals *quite* so visibly in his face."

"No," added Lillian Sunderland, "it's his one redeeming quality. In *my* opinion, if he added to his other lofty attitudes, that superb complaisance which makes Ellen Jernyngham almost intolerable at times, I think I should detest him. Charlie Brian suits *me* better."

"I would not advise you to tell Lotta so," suggested her elder sister. "He suits *her* better too."

"Of course! Don't I know *that*? It's one of my chief reasons for liking him. A poor girl can afford to be



frank and friendly with a young man who is engaged or nearly so, to her best friend. It's your eligibles who keep us on our guard, or get us scandalized."

"Lill," said Ruth Sunderland anxiously, "do you think that Lotta is *engaged* to Charlie Brian?"

"Allow me to possess my opinion in peace, sister dear."

"Because," added Ruth, "I don't believe that it would suit—Mrs. Baring."

"Which?"

"Mrs. Jacob Baring, of course. Who ever heard of Lotta's mother being displeased with Lotta's pleasures, or possessing an opinion of her own?"

"I don't think," said Lillian dryly, "that Mrs. Jacob Baring will be consulted."

Ruth was busy at the mirror, enveloping her throat in some fleecy lace, and she gave this her full attention for several moments; then—

"I wonder where Kenneth Baring *is*" she said speculatively.

"Hum," said Lillian. "If you are *very* anxious to know, I recommend you to inquire of Rene Brian."

Ruth suddenly withdrew her fingers from the cloud of lace and turned to face her sister.

"Lill!" she cried, "are you *sure*?"

Kenneth Baring was a name seldom spoken at the Hills in those days. He was the son of Jacob Baring by an early marriage, his mother having died at his birth. Mrs. Baring, the second, had been, at the time of her meeting with Jacob Baring, a widow with one daughter. This daughter had been given her step-father's name and been reared as his own. But Mrs. Baring had always been strangely sensitive about these early marriages and there had always existed a feud between herself and Kenneth, dating, so it was said, from the moment of his emphatic refusal, when a mere child, to

acknowledge, or call her anything, but his step-mother.

He grew up hot-blooded, head-strong, unmanageable, "the black sheep of the Barings," his uncle called him, and after leaving home and returning again many times, he had finally gone "for good," he said, a little less than a year previous to Mr. Jermyn's advent at the Hills.

Possibly Jacob Baring may have missed his scapegrace son; perhaps, at times, longed for his return, but Mrs. Baring's sway was absolute and she had frowned down the habit of speaking of Kenneth, until it had become obsolete—at least in her presence.

Lotta and Linette, however, remembered "Poor Ken." with much of cousinly kindness, and if they seemed to ignore his existence, it was not because they had forgotten it.

In fact, any allusion, direct or otherwise, to Kenneth Baring, was sure to bring a look of mystery to Lotta's face, and from her lips sooner or later, some remark concerning "Aunt Jake," that could not have been construed in that lady's favor.

Rene Brian was often at the Hills during these summer days, but the distance she had chosen to place between herself and Mr. Jermyn did not decrease.

His manner toward her was the perfection of frankness and cordial admiration, but it met with no responsive cordiality, and this fact might, had Mr. Jermyn possessed the vanity of most handsome men, have piqued him into remembering her, when, otherwise, she would have been forgotten.

Certain it is that during all these days at Roseville, he continued to speak of her openly in terms of respectful admiration, and to show her, by his manner, that the barrier of coldness between them was not of his making.

But the barrier remained.

Scarcely a day passed now that did not see him dropping in upon Charlie Brian for a stray half-hour, sitting in one of the editor's chairs, and scanning the exchanges; sometimes lowering his paper to watch the deft movements of Rene's flying fingers, as she stood at the compositor's case; or to note the pretty poise of her head, which, as she worked, was always averted. And one day sitting thus and watching her work, a slight accident brought about a discovery.

They had just been examining the mail, when he entered the office and Rene at sight of him had hastily thrust two or three letters into her pocket, and turned to resume her work.

His coming, or some other cause, may have served to agitate her, and make her usually steady hand uncertain; for, by an inadvertent movement, the stick fell from her grasp and the type it contained was scattered upon the floor at her feet.

As he sprang to her aid she also bent forward, and, instantly there fell at his feet two letters and a photograph, its face, the face of a handsome young man, upturned directly under his eyes.

Instantly he picked them up and restored them to their owner; as he did so their eyes met, hers full of repellent coldness; his with his usual expression of grave frankness and courtesy.

That evening, at sunset, while Miss Jernyngham and Mr. Jermyn were drifting slowly upon the river that skirted the grounds of the Hills, sounds of merriment came down to them from the lawn just above, and the gentleman turned his face in that direction.

"It's archery," said Miss Jernyngham languidly. "Mr. and Miss Brian are there I believe."

"Miss Brian is a fine shot with a bow," he said, still gazing shoreward.



"Is she?" Miss Jernyngham manifested signs of absolute fatigue. "I don't know—I am not a judge of the sport."

"No?" he turned his eyes upon her meditatively.

"Miss Brian," said the lady quite frostily, "has had an excellent tutor—I am told."

"Indeed! whom?"

"The young man who is said to be her betrothed. Mr. Kenneth Baring."

She was watching him keenly through half-closed lids, but her communication had no visible effect, except to rouse the speculative look once more.

"Kenneth Baring," he said slowly. "I don't think I have heard of him."

"He is the son of Mr. Jacob Baring," she said, her tone a shade less frigid. "He ran away from home, I believe—in disgrace. I—have never met him."

"He ran away from home—in disgrace," he repeated her words slowly and then leaned forward to look into her face.

Miss Jernyngham," he said earnestly, "could you—think—could *you*, ever care for—ever forgive a man of whom it was once said: 'He ran away from home—in disgrace?'"

## CHAPTER XI

### THE LION TAMED

She started slightly and drew back a trifle, letting her eyes rest upon the side of the drifting boat.

"I don't know," she said hesitatingly, "you—I do not understand."

He drew a long breath and then bent to take up the oars; half a dozen swift strokes and the boat shot out into the stream, then he rowed more gently and they were gliding down the river and away from the sounds upon the Hills now behind them.

As he bent to his oars she lifted her eyes for one quick furtive glance at his face. It was calm, as usual, but there was a new look of resolve upon it, and it occurred to her for the first time that it was a strong masterful face, while the firm grasp of the slender white hand upon the oars made her vaguely cognizant of an iron will commanding all that he did.

What was he about to say, this man who was her ideal of high-bred manhood? whose admiration for herself was so flattering to her pride?

For a time it seemed as if he were reconsidering that which he had already said—that he had no more words to add. Then he loosened his grasp upon the oars and, lifted his eyes to her face, letting them rest there with grave asking scrutiny:

"I never thought," he began in his lowest, slowest, mellowest tone, "I never thought, when I came to Roseville, that while here, I should find that which must in

some way affect all my future. I thought that I had left behind me my own personality—all of me that was not visible in my everyday life. That life has had its clouds and its rugged places, and I came to this place a weary man, seeking nothing, wishing for nothing save rest and quiet. You know, it is known to most who know me here, how the discovery made by an ignorant and too curious woman brought to the knowledge of many certain bits of my personal history, which I never meant for the public—"

Miss Jernyngham began to play with the fringe of her parasol.

"I know," she murmured.

"I did not and do not desire to make capital of my position," he resumed. "That I am the second son of Sir Ralph Forster Jermyn, should not weigh with you, nor will it, I am sure. Better men than I, are the sons of laborers. I am the son of an English peer, and that you may see in what esteem my father holds me, will you peruse this letter; it is the same that fell into Miss Brian's hands, the letter found by Mrs. Brace, the last I ever received, or may ever receive, from—my father. Will you not read it?"

She leaned forward, took the letter from his hand and read it slowly, her cheeks flushing, her hands slightly tremulous.

"Thank you," she said, folding the paper and returning it to him.

"I am the son of a father who has virtually cast me off," he resumed gravely; "and of my own choice I shall never return to England—but I *am* his son and—my elder brother, through having led a dissipated life, is now in his prime, a broken-down man; should I outlive him, I shall some day be Sir Edward Jermyn. I shall never go back to my country unless that day comes. And I do



not wish it to come. I wish my honorable brother a long, long life. I like America, and the American people; I am content to call it my home. Am I wearying you, Miss Jernyngham?"

She was listening with bated breath and she leaned forward a trifle as she whispered:

"No—oh no!"

"I came to your country," he went on, "a mere youth, hot-blooded, head-strong, unfamiliar with the world and its snares for unwary feet. I had much to learn, and no one to teach me. Miss Jernyngham, do you wonder that I fell into danger, into trouble?"

His voice took on a tone of pathos; he leaned toward her, his appealing eyes searching her face.

She made a movement as if to speak, but her lips closed silently.

"Your face is full of sympathy," he said softly; "your eyes are compassionate, and yet—my courage fails me. I wished to tell you just how this trouble came upon me—a trouble that has made me for years a heavy-hearted world-weary man, living my life alone with no friend to cheer me, no tender womanly hand to rest in mine, no loving voice to teach me hope's lesson; ah! how can I tell it."

For that moment Ellen Jernyngham was what sweeter, simpler souls may be always, a self-forgetting, sympathetic woman.

"Do not tell it!" she cried impulsively. "Do not tell it, I beg!"

"If I ever tell it," he said slowly, "it must be now. It is the best time. It need never be recalled then."

"It need never be recalled *now*," she said. "Why should you call up a sorrowful past and bring to yourself new pain—for me?"

"For you!" he said softly, "because what the world, all

the rest of the world, may say or think of me is nothing. It is upon what you think and what you say, that my future—my happiness depends."

He paused and laid one hand upon the resting oar, glancing shoreward. The boat had drifted around a bend of the river within full sight of John Baring's lower lawn, and girlish forms in gauzy summer dresses were running down the grassy slope toward them.

He took up the other oar with a half-reluctant air and headed the drifting boat inland.

Then for a moment he lifted the oars clear of the water and leaned across them toward her.

"Tell me," he said, "now before we go back to them; can you ever think of me as more than a friend? I am not worthy of your regard—no man ever will be—but such as I am, will you accept my homage—will you let me hope that some day you will trust your future to my care?"

The oars dropped as if of their own volition back into the water; his slim hands tightened about them; something in his manner, subdued though it was, seemed urging on her answer; it left upon her mind the strange impression that her latitude was bounded by the river's margin, and then—what trifles sometimes shape our future—she caught from the shore the ring of Rene Brian's clear musical laughter. No one else *could* laugh like that.

One, two—three strokes of the oars, his eyes resting the while upon her face.

Her heart and her pride were at war with each other. In all her visions of proud conquest, she had never seen herself in this situation, almost forced by a will stronger than her own, to capitulate at once.

They were nearing the shore, hidden for a moment, from those who awaited them, by a clump of trees over-

run with tangled vines. In that moment, overcome by the urgency of the situation, her pride forsook her and she did a simple, womanly, graceful thing.

She leaned forward and held out to him her white, aristocratic hand.

Without releasing his grasp of the oars, he bent forward and touched it with his lips, and, in another moment, they came to the shore.

When he assisted her from the boat, he held her hand, the same hand, in his own firm, strong clasp for a moment; releasing it with a pressure that spoke as plainly as words could have spoken, his sense of possession.

The next morning, Mr. Jermyn appeared at an early hour in Charlie Brian's office.

The young editor who was at his desk glanced up quickly.

"Good morning," he said, "glad to see you, Jermyn. Just wait one moment." He was dashing off a letter while he spoke. "I have a word to say, something concerning—remotely—yourself."

"And I," said his visitor smiling and proffering a white firm hand, "have something to say which concerns myself so *closely* that you really *must* give it precedence."

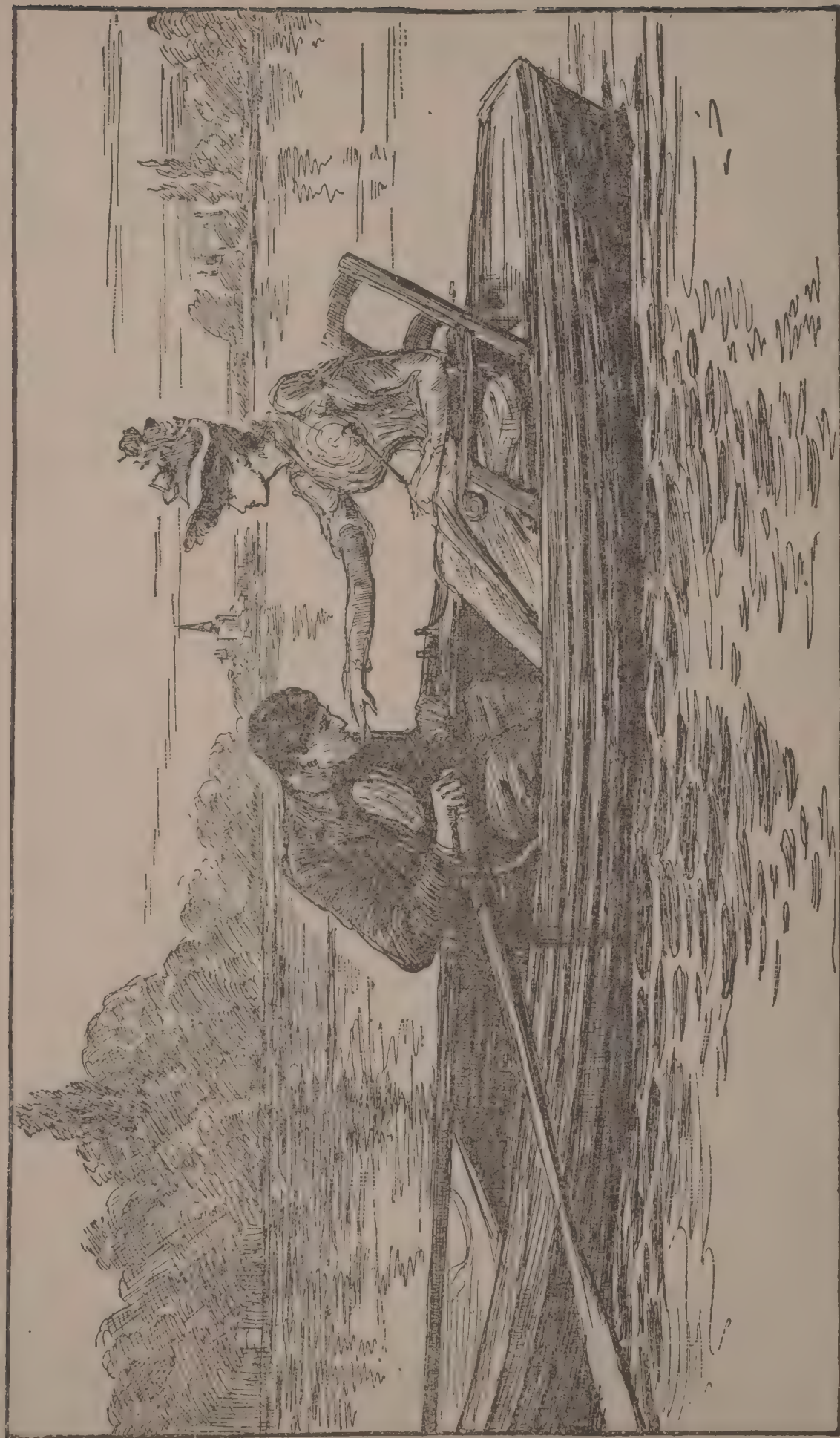
Brian laid down his pen and extended his hand, his face expressive of surprise and some anxiety.

"It hardly calls for that look, at least I hope not, Brian, I want you to be the first to congratulate me. I am engaged to Miss Jernyngham."

"By Jove!" ejaculated Brian, and then he pulled himself together and said the proper words, but the look of surprise still lingered in his eyes.

"It has been rather sudden," said Jermyn coolly, "and *quite* unpremeditated, upon both sides, when we paddled





HE BENT FORWARD AND TOUCHED HER HAND WITH HIS LIPS.—Slender Clue, p. 112.



out into that fateful little river of yours last evening; but we fell into a strain of mutual reminiscence, and both became confidential in spite of ourselves. The barriers seemed to have been swept away on the flow of the river. Perhaps *you* can understand it?" and he smiled again.

"I think so." Brian flushed and both men laughed.

Two woman would have begun with the announcement, and ended only with the wedding; the two men, having discussed the fact turned to another subject, after a moment of silence.

"Brian," said Jermyn, "you have not forgotten that we have planned to run up to Chicago together, have you?"

"No."

"Well, that book upon Irish antiquities has not arrived, and I don't feel disposed to wait patiently. Suppose we run up to-night, and back to-morrow? It's your off day."

And now it was Brian who laughed. "And the lady," he asked, "has she given her consent?"

"I'll make a clean breast of it. I have already arranged it with her and—I have made *you* responsible, in part at least, for the journey. Can you go? I really want my book, a man can't feed his intellect upon love *alone*, you know, Brian. Besides—don't you see—one must buy a diamond or an opal—"

"Not an opal surely!"

"The lady is not superstitious, and I believe *she* would choose the combination, opal *and* diamond. But you—is it yes?"

"If you like."

"And we start to-night?"

"Yes," Brian turned toward his desk. "Now hear *my* story. It will furnish variety." He took up a letter,



awkwardly folded, and Jermyn settled himself as if to listen at his ease:

"It's a news letter from my Upton correspondent," Brian explained as he unfolded it. "Listen."

"The town of Upton is in a high state of excitement to-day over the absence of Miss Bertha Warham, upon the eve of her marriage; all sorts of rumors are afloat, and foul play is feared by her friends. Her room was found in the wildest confusion and there are other signs of violence. Mr. Warham is in serious trouble although he still hopes; when the wild rumors have been sifted we will send further details."

Brian laid aside the letter and looked up.

"Really! Rather unsatisfactory reporter that," was Jermyn's comment; "missing on the eve of her wedding! how dramatic! Miss—whom did you say. Bertha, was it—? Bertha—why yes," rousing himself a little, "was not that the name of the young woman I saw in the woods, near that place, what was it?—that romantic spot which I have never visited since, in spite of my good resolutions. And that fellow—Jove! sitting suddenly erect. Does your letter mention *him*?"

"Yes, I did not read it all. It says he has been absent, nobody knows where, for some time."

"Ah! Really. I feel interested."

"I have been thinking," said Brian, "of all that you told me, Jermyn, about that meeting at Death Rock."

"Death Rock! yes; that *was* it."

"And I wonder," went on Brian, "in case this matter is not cleared up, if it would not be right to make what you saw and heard known to the proper authorities."

"About that lovers' quarrel you mean?"

"Yes, about the threats made by Larsen. I have thought there might be a connection, perhaps, between that day's meeting at Death Rock and this disappearance."

Jermyn got up and took a turn about the room.

"Brian," he said then, coming back to the desk and standing before the editor with a look of kindly solicitude upon his face, "I would be the last man to put a straw in the way of justice, and yet, I *do* feel reluctant to have my name used in connection with this matter. Can't you see how awkward it would be for me? Especially *now*, for Miss Jernyngham's sake I would wish not to be, mixed up in this affair."

"Yes, I can see that, still—"

"Of course if the case becomes serious, and if this Larsen's name becomes mixed up with it, as it is likely to be since so many know of their troubles—"

"Oh he will be sure to be suspected, unless the girl is found; and arrested unless he can prove an alibi, I should judge from that letter; I only meant that in *case* of his arrest, and if an additional link were needed—"

"Oh! I see; *you* have already condemned Larsen—which only proves that I should *not* speak unless the man is accused. Besides, how could I identify the girl? No, Brian, if the fellow is accused I will come forward and tell what I can. But I shall do it reluctantly and not until there is some other proof against him."

"Well," said Brian rising and shutting the roller of his desk, "that will be time enough; after all I fancy if the girl has really met with foul play, and at Larsen's hands, there will be evidence in plenty against him without drawing upon you for corroboration."

"I hope so," said Jermyn, "I do indeed."

That evening Jermyn and the young editor set out for the city.

Before leaving his room Mr. Jermyn reread a brief note which had come to him in that morning's mail from the city. It was inclosed in a large business-like envelope and addressed to him in a big business-like

hand. But the lines upon the big sheet were not so expansive, though the words were business-like too.

"MY FRIEND:

"I am here in safety; please come as soon as possible.

Jermyn smiled while he tore the note into tatters.

"That was a bright thought," he said to himself.

"Taking Brian makes me quite safe. Luck is certainly smiling upon me."



## CHAPTER XII

### MISSING

On a morning of this golden spring, which the Fates were making so balmily sweet to the sense, so soft to the aristocratic feet of Percy Jermyn, ten days after the interview last recorded between himself and young Brian, Mr. Rufus Carnes, smiling, serene, at peace with all the world, himself included, and humming a gay little opera catch, was stepping jauntily into the office of his very good friend, the Chief of Police.

A little of the jauntiness fell away from him as, upon opening the door, he found himself face to face with a veiled woman, tall and ample, dressed in rustling silk, and filling up the doorway; but over her shoulder he saw the serene face of the "captain," and his confidence returned; he bowed politely, stepped aside, and, in a moment the danger had passed; the veiled woman was sweeping down the dingy corridor and Carnes was standing within the captain's office, leaving that official to close his own door, which he did softly, slowly, and then turned toward his guest.

"I wonder," he began surveying Carnes with an air of languid interest, "if you *never* intend to get over it."

"I'm over it now," said Carnes testing with his hand the springs of an office-chair before trusting himself to its embrace. "It was only a momentary weakness this time."

And satisfied of the trustworthiness of the chair, he seated himself.

"I wouldn't," said the captain, going back to his desk and sitting in his usual place, "I wouldn't be so intimidated by a woman for—for all the women in the world."

"But," urged Carnes with a whimsical air of self-defense, "this one was such a very large one. Now wasn't it?"

"Umph!" ejaculated the captain, "you're the same old sixpence," and then, as if to rebuke the jovial detective for bringing so trifling a mood into high places, he took from his desk a photograph which lay face downward upon an open record and began to eye it with the air of a smart school-boy conning a lesson.

Seeing him thus occupied, Carnes began to amuse himself. Upon the walls of the office were some lithographs, two oil paintings and a collection of photographs in one huge frame. In a corner cabinet was a motley array of knives, pistols, burglar's implements and other "curiosities of justice," supposedly dear to the heart of one of her officials. There was the hat of a notorious and recently hanged criminal; the handkerchief found beside a murdered woman, and never called for by its owner; handcuffs that had done themselves honor by holding, in close fellowship, the two hands of a wealthy and aristocratic absconder afterward released by "justice" at the earnest supplication of wealth and aristocracy.

Near the corner of the desk hung a file of posters large and small, and as many-hued as a Japanese picture; the one uppermost, and directly under the gaze of Mr. Carnes being a bright blue card, headed in startling yellow letters, "*Reward offered.*"

All these objects were familiar to Carnes, but he, who so often played a part, tragic or comic, as the case might be for the benefit of the majority and the confusion of the minority, one or more, against whom the majority had raised its voice, had occasionally a whim-

sical fancy for doing a bit of burlesque to please himself, and on this occasion he chose to believe that he was viewing the glories of the captain's office for the first time, and from the point of view of a novice.

So he turned and twisted in his leather-covered chair, gazed up and around him and finally leaned forward and touched the blue placard with one finger so timidly, so respectfully, with such an air of mingled awe and admiration that the captain, who for some moments had been furtively watching him while holding the photograph, broke into a short laugh.

"Sometimes I think you have mistaken your calling, Carnes," he said admiringly. "Did you ever try the stage?"

"Yes," answered Carnes, suddenly becoming serious.

"Honestly?" asked the captain with a look of surprise.

"Oh, I was honest enough; too honest," said Carnes, a grim smile crossing his face. "Never you mind about the stage—that's a 'way-back' story. He settled himself more comfortably in his chair and his face became somber.

The captain eyed him curiously and then said slowly:

"You're a queer fish, Carnes. But keep your 'way-back' story along with your other secrets. It is not a bad idea for a detective to be a little 'remote' as you would say. As Rufe Carnes, the detective, I know you pretty well—"

"Well!" broke in Carnes, "what more is there of me? When I cease to be 'Carnes, the detective,' I shall be—nobody—nothing. Before I became Carnes the detective, I was worse than that. Is not that enough to know?"

"It's enough for me," said the captain cheerfully. "Look at that, Carnes," and he tossed him the photograph across the desk

Carnes caught it deftly and held it squarely before his eyes.



"Pretty girl," was his first remark.

"Yes."

"Crook?" suggested Carnes.

One word dropped slowly from the lips of the chief.

"*Missing.*"

"Umph," grunted Carnes still looking at the picture, then after a long scrutiny, he laid it upon his knee, looked across at the chief and said:

"Well?"

"I sent for you;" said that officer.

"I know *that*," interjected Carnes.

"Oh, you do! Well then, what are you doing?"

"That's better," laughed Carnes. "I hate rigmaroles; a man should not throw away his words—except when he throws them after his time. Business is business. I am doing—nothing."

"Carnes," said the chief, not heeding his whimsical tirade, "I hear that you have quit Sharp's agency. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"May I ask why?"

"Discharged."

"Discharged! *you?*"

"That's the idea."

The chief eyed him thoughtfully; then—

"I was informed," he said, "that you *resigned.*"

"Well!" replied Carnes, "some might call it that. I'm not particular. The truth is, Cap., that I refused to obey certain orders, and resigned to save Sharp the trouble of discharging me."

"Nonsense! you know, and I know, that he would not *do* that."

"You and I don't know what any man will do until he has done it."

"Oh, well! I see that the true inwardness of the busi-

ness is to be docketed in your 'way-back' collection. I merely spoke as friend to friend, old man."

"All right. What's next?"

The captain pointed with his index finger to the photograph that had fallen from Carnes' knee to the floor.

"I want you to find that girl."

Carnes picked up the photograph, looked at it again, then again at the captain.

"Why don't you use one of your specials?" he asked.

"Because," retorted the captain with a broad smile, "the *sooner* she is found the better."

"Eloped?" suggested Carnes.

"I said *missing*."

"Umph. Has she a name?"

"Oh yes. And that's about all that I can tell you. Her name is Bertha Warham, and she disappeared from her home some ten days ago—under peculiar circumstances."

"Oh!"

"For the rest, Carnes, you must wait until we understand each other. Will you take the case? It's go as you please and liberal pay—only find the girl."

"Who retains me?" asked Carnes musingly—"parent—guardian—?"

"The lady whom you met at my door."

"Phew!—you know I hate to deal with a woman."

"Oh I know you—but you will find this one practical enough. I did. I'll tell you one thing more, for I know your taste—there are indications in this of foul play."

Carnes took up the picture and looked at it with renewed interest; then, "I'll take a turn and think it over," he said, rising.

"Wait. If you take the case you are to deal directly with the lady."

"Oh," said Carnes, putting on his hat and resuming

his whimsical air, "*that's* no inducement. Captain, I'll see you this evening, say at ten."

Going down the steps he passed a handsome young man in uniform. They exchanged hasty greetings and the new-comer went on his way to the office.

He was one of the chief's most efficient aids, and when he had dispatched the business upon which he came he said:

"I met Carnes leaving the station as I came up."

"Yes, I have been trying for him on a new case."

"Then he *has* left the agency?"

"Yes; so you have heard of it?"

"I have, and from one of their own men. Rather, I heard that Sharp had required Carnes to do a piece of work which he, Carnes thought too dirty. There was more or less of an explosion."

"No doubt. Carnes has not quite got over it. Eh, Felix?"

The young man laughed.

"Carnes is a fine fellow," he said; "but at the time I received my information it was a little uncertain whether Sharp would discharge Carnes or Carnes Sharp."

The captain lighted a cigar and puffed thoughtfully. "It would suit me very well if Carnes never went back," he said. "But he will—of course."

"Oh certainly! he is too valuable a man to quarrel with. And he is not the first man who has rebelled against hard orders."

"True." assented the chief. "And he won't be the last; they are hard on the boys up there."

\* \* \* \* \*

Rufus Carnes went about the city after his interview with the chief of police, like a man who had nothing on his mind. He may have been pondering deeply the while, but his jaunty air was unabated; he would never have been taken for a man of affairs



He drank a glass of wine at a restaurant, and while waiting he took up the evening paper, moist from the press, but it did not seem to interest him until his eyes began to scan the column of "*wants.*" There he read:

*"Wanted—Information of any sort concerning Bertha Warham. She will hear of something important to her if she will apply to B 3, Owl office."*

"Oh! ho!" muttered Mr. Carnes, wrinkling his brows as he reperused the advertisement. "*That's a queer one!*"

He sipped his wine thoughtfully, and directed his steps toward the office of the "Owl," where he was soon face to face with the individual in charge of the advertising department, who, from his greeting, must have been an old acquaintance.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated, glancing up from what appeared to be a book of accounts. "It's you, is it? Anything up?"

"Nothing special," replied Carnes easily. "You have been at the window, Martin?"

"All day" said the person addressed as Martin.

"Which window?"

"Oh there you are, eh? males."

Carnes muttered something that was smothered by his mustache, then aloud:

"Somebody has advertised for one Bertha Warham. Do you know anything about it?"

"Wait a moment," said the man slowly; "I'm just closing this book."

"Then I'll stop until you come out," said Carnes, "and we will take some supper."

"I wouldn't mind a turn at the theater too," suggested the other, beginning to write; "I've got tickets for the 'Bouffers.'"

"One thing at a time," replied Carnes, "and supper first."

The advertising columns of the daily paper are often used for purposes not sanctioned by the law, and in hunting out certain swindles and bringing these schemes to grief Mr. Carnes had found that friends in the newspaper sanctuary were almost indispensable, and he had contrived to gain the confidence or win the admiration of various attaches of the press, who might, in various ways, become useful in his operations.

Martin had more than once been of service to him, and was rather proud of the fact, and he was in high good humor when he set out with Carnes, for he was yet young enough to enjoy a mystery, and not yet man of the world enough to affect to be, or to be in truth, *blase*.

It was not until they were seated at the table with a comfortable supper spread before them that Carnes renewed the subject of the advertisement by pulling the paper from his pocket and spreading it out, with his finger upon the paragraph.

"Run your eye over that, Martin," he said, "to refresh your memory. I want a description of the person who inserted it. Was it a woman?"

"If it was," replied Martin, "I am a failure, for I did not attend to their business to-day."

"But that has been your window?"

"Yes, but we have got a new hand—a young lady, related to the firm—d'ye see?"

"I see," assented Carnes. Then bending forward he watched the face of Martin, who was scanning the advertisement with a look of perplexity.

Presently he glanced up and said impressively:

"I recognize it."

"Could you recognize the author of it? that's the question," said Carnes shortly. "Don't dawdle, Martin, it always ruffles my temper."

Martin looked at a plate of crisply fried chicken, and toyed with his fork while he said:

'Yes, I would recognize the advertiser. I can see him now just as I saw him this morning, he was—'

"Never mind *what* he was, since you have nailed him. He will keep; our supper won't. Let's fall to. I see a man that I know a few tables from us; if he sees me—"



## CHAPTER XIII

### A TOUCH OF SUPERSTITION

Carnes and young Martin arrived late at the theater. The first act was almost over when they came down the center aisle, very much to the annoyance of a few who had really come to see and hear, and who were forced to rise and flatten themselves against the backs of their plush-cushioned chairs, to let them pass to the last two seats in the half circle, just four tiers back from the orchestra.

It was too late to catch the meaning of the first act—if a comic opera may ever be said to have a meaning; so, although this was a very new and very funny comic opera, and Carnes, when off duty was never averse to being amused, he sank into a languid attitude and looked listless and uninterested.

In reality, however, he was thinking, not of the comic opera, but of the photograph of missing Bertha Warham.

At first young Martin gave his attention to the stage, but the stars were off and a not very melodious chorus was on. It was a masculine chorus too, and so Martin, after glancing twice or thrice at his indifferent companion, turned half round in his chair and began a survey of the house; first the boxes, then the parquette, then the family circle, dress circle, balcony, then up toward the "gallery of the gods." His look was cool and languidly critical, just the look assumed by nine-tenths of the youth who frequent the theaters, and have not lived long enough to look upon this sort of affectation as a symptom of

the callow stage. It seemed to say: "Oh yes, I see you, because I can't help it; you are not interesting but a man must look somewhere."

When Martin had overlooked the house in this manner, from one point of view, he turned in his chair and began a slow survey of the opposite side, when suddenly he sat more erect, and forgot his languor, with his gaze riveted upon some object in the balcony; while he still gazed the act-drop fell, and there was a stir and buzz in the audience; women began to whisper and giggle; men began to fish for hats, and to crowd past their neighbors in their customary exit in search of the customary clove; small boys began to cry "books-o-th-opery," "fans," and "opera-glasses," and Martin withdrew his gaze from the balcony and seized his companion's arm.

"We must have a glass," he whispered; "I think he's up there."

"Where," asked Carnes sharply, but without turning his head.

"Balcony, second row—just—"

"I'll get the glass," interrupted Carnes, still without turning. "Keep your eye on him, but be careful, don't look too steadily." And he beckoned a boy and secured two opera-glasses, handing one to Martin and holding the other ready for use.

Martin seized the proffered glass and leveled it at once upon the object of interest in the balcony. It was a momentary glance, then he lowered the glass and turned toward Carnes with lips apart, to find that cool personage gazing fixedly through his glass at a group of ladies in a proscenium box.

"Well?" said Carnes without lowering his glass.

"It's the same fellow. He sits in the second row to the right of the woman in the big red hat. He's alone I should say, and has got an opera-glass. He's spruced

up since morning, but I should have recognized that queer head of his, even if he *hadn't* written that 'ad.' over so many times, and you hadn't brought him back to my mind by inquiring about it."

"Martin," said Carnes slowly and still keeping his face squarely toward the front, "don't look at the fellow any more; if you remember *him*, he will be likely to remember you, especially as he will see you again when he calls for his letters. I'll have to cut you now—I am going into the balcony to get a nearer view—"

"But you have not seen him yet," broke in Martin, a little annoyed at the other's coolness.

Carnes made a gesture of impatience.

"Martin you are asleep," he said. "If he has a glass he may have seen you just as you have seen him, and if he sees me with you he may recognize *me*—if he meets me again; he may not be so dull as he looks. In our business we find it safest to consider a man wise until he has proved himself a fool. I'll see you to-morrow Martin, and—don't turn your gaze upon that young man in the balcony any oftener than you can help. There—they're going to ring up that confounded curtain—I'm off."

And he went, leaving Martin—very much puzzled and considerably dissatisfied—to interest himself in the second act as best he could.

"He's a cool hand," thought the young man as he turned his eyes toward the rising curtain. "But I'll see him to-morrow."

But the morrow brought him disappointment. In spite of his promise it was many days before he saw Carnes again.

In the meantime Carnes consumed some moments and provoked some uncomplimentary remarks from the gods, by entering the gallery, having first enlisted the



services of an obliging usher, and working his way, by dint of bribing, exchange, and, in the cases of one or two undeveloped deities, ousting by forcible means, into a seat in the front row where he could look directly down into the face of the young man in the balcony.

The second act was bright and piquant; the stage swarmed with gayly robed maidens; there were some pretty faces, some sweet voices, and an unusual number of handsome figures.

The young man in the balcony kept his eyes or his glass fixed upon the stage and Carnes could study him at leisure; and this he did, making mental notes as follows:

"Square-headed fellow, obstinate I'll wager; tall I should say from the way his legs are twisted up; low narrow forehead, heavy brows, nose big and a half-hook, mouth wide, lips thin, teeth prominent, a mustache would improve him; chin—*what* a chin! resolution there—No, doggedness is the word. Tanned hands, bony and big; shop clothes and ill-fitting; too much watch chain, blue necktie, *blue!* Rural; it's written all over him. He's coarse and strong, not keen witted, but has an iron will. That man under different phases of development might turn out a fanatic, a dangerous lunatic, or a murderer. Ugh! he's an ugly beast, and *he's* the man who wants to tell Miss Bertha Warham, wherever she may be, something to her advantage! If that photograph speaks truly she's too pretty and too dainty to have dealings with *you*, Mr. 'Dog in the manger.'"

When he had reached this point in his soliloquy, Carnes checked his flow of thought, and consulted his watch. It lacked but fifteen minutes to ten, and with one more long look at the man in the balcony he made his way out of the theater, just as the second act had

reached its interesting climax, and once more to the disgust of the neighboring gods.

At five minutes after ten he walked into the office of Captain B—, and said, as he came to a halt before the desk where that personage sat perusing a long sheet of manuscript—

"I'll take the case, Cap."

The captain looked up, laid aside his manuscript, and said with equal brevity—

"Good! Then I'll wash *my* hands of it."

Carnes dropped into the chair which he had tested and found trustworthy in the morning, and fixing his eyes upon the corner of the desk where a bright red placard had replaced the blue one upon the file, asked:

"Have you read the evening paper?"

"No. I've been busy over reports all the evening."

"Then you don't know," said Carnes who never wasted words, "that someone has advertised for Bertha Warham?"

"*What!* can that woman have done the very thing I told her *not* to do?"

"Do you mean the large woman? No doubt she *will* disregard your sage advice, in some particular; she may have instigated this—but, it was a man who wrote the advertisement and gave it to Martin at the 'Owl' office."

"What sort of a man?"

"A big, burly, ugly, rustic looking fellow—a devil of a fellow. But whisht! I'll begin at the beginning."

And Carnes briefly recounted his adventures from the moment of his discovery in the columns of the "Owl;" to the time of his leaving the theater, at the height of the brilliant second act.

"Well!" said the chief, still smiling at the picture Carnes had drawn, "you have not made him out a handsome fellow. He don't seem to strike you favorably, eh?"

Carnes' face became suddenly grave.

"When I was a boy," he said slowly, "every sensation had its sign, and my grandmother had a store of both; a sudden chill passing over one quickly, from head to foot, meant that the soul of an enemy was taking one's measure for one's grave. If that fellow had once *looked* at me I'd have sworn he was taking *my* measure, to-night."

The captain laughed his short crisp laugh, and Carnes, rising, seemed to shake off his gravity in the act. He crossed the room to a table littered with books, pamphlets and papers, and turned over those that lay uppermost.

"Here is the 'Owl,' he said, returning with the paper in his hand. "And here's the 'ad'."

The captain took the paper and read the advertisement, then lifted his eyes and fixed them upon the face of Carnes.

"*You've* undertaken to find this Bertha Warham," he said slowly; "what are you going to do about this?"

"Find out who sent it," said Carnes promptly.

"That—of course."

"Go to the 'Owl' in the morning, pipe our rustic friend to his place of abode. When I am sure I can find him again when wanted, call upon the old lady—"

"How do you know she is old?" queried the captain.

"She's old, or else she is ugly; a pretty woman won't veil herself in that uncanny fashion. She's old or else she's ugly. Which is it, Cap?"

"Both."

"Worse yet. When can I see her?"

"If she does not hear from me in the meantime, she will call here at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Then you may take her address, and tell her I'll call upon *her* at two P. M."



## CHAPTER XIV

### DETECTIVE AND CLIENT

At a quarter before two o'clock, a woman sat in the small private parlor of an unfashionable hotel, beating her foot upon the gaudy carpet, looking restlessly out of the window upon an uninteresting ebb and flow of humanity just beneath, and glancing from moment to moment at the open watch which she held in her hand.

She was tall and large; her eyes, black and restless, were sunk far back in their cavities, her nose was long and sharply pointed, her mouth wide and thin-lipped; many would have pronounced her a woman of iron resolution, but a certain twitching about the corners of the mouth, a quivering of the nostrils accompanied by frequent and restless movements of the hands, and shifting of the feet, betrayed a temperament not wholly within its owner's control. Hers was a strong personality, but, like many such, it had its limits. She was sure to control, when she chose, a will less strong than her own—even to intimidate such an one; and she was equally sure to be intimidated if not wholly controlled by a more powerful mind, and a will possessing what she lacked: perfect coolness and freedom from all nervous excitability.

There was a certain richness about her dress, with as certain an absence of good taste and appropriateness, and a too evident effort at youthfulness displayed in the carefully powdered face, which rendered more visible and unsightly a wrinkled, sallow neck, encircled by a

huge silk ruffle; while the abundance of hair looped and coiled at the top of her head, presented three distinct shades, and told too plainly its miscellaneous origin.

When the hand of her watch indicated that the hour had come she arose, and putting away the time-piece, began pacing the room restlessly.

Once—twice—thrice, she trod the length of the small room, then again consulted her watch.

Two o'clock and sixty seconds; and, almost at the tick of the last, a rap sounded on the door just behind her; she turned quickly and opened it wide.

It was Rufus Carnes who entered, but not the Rufus Carnes we have seen.

The original Rufus Carnes is a big, good-looking fellow, with face smooth-shaven, keen, mocking brown eyes, close-cropped brown hair, and bluff, abrupt manners.

The gentleman who enters is a man of middle age who might be taken for an elderly fop; his hair is long and curls at the ends, just above his immaculate collar; it is scented and oiled, and it is streaked with gray. He wears a short mustache and a trim, sharply-pointed beard, both of which are dyed black; gold-rimmed eye-glasses are perched upon his nose, and anyone knowing him to have been Rufus Carnes, might easily suspect him of having tampered with his complexion. He certainly showed an aristocratic pallor. In his left hand he carried a shining silk hat, and this hand, as well as the one which extended to the woman a card bearing the name of Rufus Carnes, was immaculately gloved.

Before this shining presence, the woman stood in silent but too evident expectancy, holding the card in her extended hand.

Then her visitor said with brisk politeness:

"Permit me, madam," stepped within and closed the door.

For a moment the two stood face to face, each seeming to measure the other, then the woman stepped back, a faint smile widening her thin lips. She had detected, or fancied she had, a look of admiring surprise in the face of her visitor.

"Take a chair, Mr. Carnes," she said, after a second glance at the card, and indicating by a gesture a comfortable lounging chair. "I have been very anxious to see you."

Mr. Carnes advanced and gallantly wheeled forward a second chair for his hostess, placing it near the one she had proffered him, while she in her turn favored him with a glance of surprise and admiration; and under these favorable auspices, the encounter began.

"I am told," said Carnes, taking from his pocket a memorandum and seeming to consult it, "I am told that you have lost a daughter, Mrs Warham," and he lifted his eyes to her face and touched his lips with a dainty gold pencil.

"Only a step-daughter, sir."

"Oh! Oh, that is not quite so sad, but bad enough, bad enough."

"Yes, indeed!" said the woman, rather shortly. "It's *bad* enough and trouble enough, mercy knows!"

Carnes bowed and smiled and wrote down in his little note book:

*"Only a step-daughter."*

Now a note-book, as reporters and as many others use it, was a senseless thing to Carnes; he relied upon his clear head and excellent memory; but he had his eccentricities, and one of these was to commit the overflow of his thoughts to paper, in his own whimsical way; to read his mental comments to his chief or a brother officer, when they were at hand, and to destroy these "notes," read or unread, within twenty-four hours. Thus, while



the counterfeit dandy played the role of a much admiring and not too keen officer, the real Carnes aided by the pencil of Carnes the dandy, jotted down his real opinions, for the secret edification of his real, whimsical self, and Mrs. Lucretia Warham looking on, fancied him making notes of her conversation, every one of which, she judged from the expression of his rapt countenance, must have been a note of admiration.

The real Carnes having launched himself with a quotation, the spurious Carnes began.

"Now, my dear madam. I am sent, as you understand by the chief of police, to aid you—acting under your instructions, in finding your missing step-daughter. If we proceed together it will be quite independently. From the time I enter your service Captain B—— resigns all part and interest in the affair. Do you so understand it?"

"It was my proposition," said Mrs. Warham loftily. "I told the Captain *decidedly* that I didn't want a pack of police hunting after Bertha."

"You are certainly a clear-headed woman," said Carnes with a broad look of admiration. "A man will not need the police force at his back if he can rely upon *your* aid as an adviser, you know. *Now* Mrs. Warham, I am here, sent by Captain B——, recommended I suppose—"

"Oh, most highly!" cried Mrs. Warham.

"Then, having seen me, madam, are *you* satisfied? it is your case, not Capt. B——'s; are you willing to trust me? and confide this search to me?"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Warham with enthusiasm, "I am more than willing! I was satisfied of your ability after hearing of you from Captain B——. Now that I have *seen* you I am *delighted!*"

Carnes bowed, murmured something about a woman's goodness, and wrote in his note book:

"Bow-wow-wow!"

"Now then," he began again briskly, "as we are mutually satisfied, madam, we will hasten to business. I am at your disposal for two hours if necessary; will you please begin at the beginning, and relate to me the exact circumstance of this affair of yours? Tell it in your own way, and omit *nothing* that you think might be of the slightest importance. I must rely upon what you tell me for my clue," and then he wrote in his note-book, "Bad luck to me if I do," closed it, laid it upon his knee, and leaning back in his chair toyed with his gold pencil, while Mrs. Warham began at the beginning.

It had been the full intention of Mrs. Warham to tell the story in her own way, and that way was long and circuitous, causing Mr. Carnes to writhe inwardly and to utter many mental anathemas; but he was steadfast in his *role*, listening with a look of intent interest, which became at times, as the narrative proceeded, sympathetic or enthusiastic; at others glowing admiration.

Putting Mrs. Warham's story into fewer words, by omitting those numerous fragments which were more interesting to the lady than to the listener, it ran as follows:

Mr. John Warham, a wealthy farmer, and by some considered eccentric, if not actually miserly, was left a widower when his eldest child Mary was twelve years old, his second, Julia, ten, and his youngest, Bertha, seven. When his wife had been dead a year he married Miss Lucretia Larkins, "an ummarried woman of some property," so said Mrs. Warham. This family had lived quite pleasantly, happily in fact until Bertha grew to womanhood. Mary had been married at eighteen, to a young and "well-to-do" farmer of their neighborhood, and less than a year after this marriage Julia died of a malignant fever. Bertha then became her father's favorite.

She was bright and pretty, and possessed of a certain shrewdness which was a direct inheritance from her father, and which he rejoiced to see, and to develop in various ways. Bertha was sent to a fashionable school, but did not remain long; she was pronounced by the faculty ungovernable and had openly and repeatedly defied and set at naught the rules of the school; again she was sent to a distant seminary where she remained a year; at the end of that time her father sent for her. His health was failing; he missed his youngest daughter; he wanted her near him, so Bertha returned and entered gayly into the spirit of the neighborhood festivities; she became engaged to a rich young farmer who, Mrs. Warham felt it her duty to say, was not a favorite with Mr. Warham, although *she* considered him quite eligible, and Bertha found him, or seemed to find him sufficiently agreeable. This young man, Mrs. Warham did not name him, was really, in point of property, the best catch in the county, but he was hot-tempered and jealous, and Bertha was attractive and fond of flattery and attention; they quarreled fiercely, and the engagement was finally broken. After a time another suitor came to the Warham farm-house; he was an elderly merchant from a neighboring town, and this time Mr. Warham as well as his wife approved of the suit. Mr. March was an old friend of the Warham family, and they brought all their influence to bear upon the case; at first Bertha ridiculed the whole affair, but seemed to reconsider it; and preparations for the wedding began.

Bertha was in high spirits; she was to have a handsome house, the finest in the town, and could keep a carriage. Everybody envied her, and John Warham had arranged to dower her most liberally; everything seemed running smoothly, when, on the very day that was set for the wedding, it was discovered that Bertha was missing.



Her room was in a state of confusion; she slept in a new wing, and her windows opened upon a balcony; persons might have entered her room without disturbing the household. Bertha was very careless, and often slept with her windows unfastened, or open. She had money, jewels and valuable wedding-presents in her room. One of the farm ladders was found near the balcony, there were traces showing where it had been dragged from the barn yard, and some flower beds near at hand had been trampled as if a struggle had taken place there. The shock of her disappearance had prostrated Mrs. Warham. But John Warham had entered vigorously into the search for a time; then he too had sunk down discouraged, and his malady became serious. He refused all medical aid, and began to indulge in odd freaks, and to harbor strange theories concerning his daughter's disappearance; and when Mrs. Warham recovered, she decided to set out at once for the city, hoping with the aid of a keen detective, such as she felt sure Mr. Carnes would prove himself, to find the missing girl—for in spite of the evidence to the contrary, *she* did not believe that Bertha Warham had been murdered nor forcibly abducted.

At this point Mrs. Warham's recital ended, and Carnes sat pensively gazing at her and admiring the facility with which she had talked so much upon one subject, and thrown so little light upon it.

Then he had recourse to his note-book, in which he wrote:

"This woman is keeping something back—she is trying to mislead me."

This done he said slowly:

"You do not believe that Miss Warham was abducted, you tell me. Then you must have a theory; what is it?"

"You are wrong," she answered a trifle haughtily."

"I have no theory; I simply think the idea of an abduction ridiculous—sensational."

"But such things happen every day, madam; yes, and worse things."

"I know it; but not to girls like Bertha Warham: her head was filled with romantic notions; she was daring and fond of adventure. I don't know *where* she got her gypsyish ideas, and as I have told you, she had her father's shrewdness; only—her's all ran to mischief; while his, he turned to use in his business. Bertha ought to have been a boy!"

"Indeed!" said Carnes with his lips.

"I'm getting warm," said Carnes with his pencil.

"How do you account for those footprints, the ladder, and the confusion up in her room?" he asked looking up from his notes.

Mrs. Warham elevated her two hands, and turned her eyes toward the ceiling.

"I *don't* account for them," she said impatiently. "I leave that to *you*. I don't *believe* in them, that's all."

Carnes closed his note-book sharply, and looked her straight in the eye.

"Madam," he asked gravely, "what is your motive in coming to this city and instituting this search? This is a business consultation; you and I are partners in the business; perfect frankness is necessary between us."

She returned his direct gaze with interest.

"I don't know why you ask that question," she said, "I want to find my step-daughter."

"Why?"

She frowned, but did not withdraw her gaze. For a full moment she eyed him silently, still frowning, then—

"That is my affair," she said, quietly but firmly. "I want you to find her at any cost; wherever she is, *find her*—then bring me word."

"Oh!" said Carnes slowly. "Bring you *word*."

"Yes, bring me word! When I know where she is I will send for her father—he will be able to come, I think—he is the proper one to approach her. I don't think you understand me *yet*. I want you to *find* her, but if you bungle, and she learns in any way that she is watched, or sought after, she will make us trouble. Do you see?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Carnes again, and very softly, and then as if by accident the note-book fell open upon his knee and his hand carelessly traced the word:

"*Warmer*."

"Bertha is a willful girl," went on Mrs. Warham, her tone growing more severe; "she would never listen to me nor to her father. *He* thinks, and others think, that she has been foully dealt with. I don't believe it. I want you to *prove* that my idea is right."

Carnes sat very still before her, his attitude one of careless indolence; his eyes were half closed, and he never lifted them as he breathed out his question softly, languidly:

"What is your idea?"

The woman waved her hands with a contemptuous gesture.

"Bah!" she said, "she wanted to see the world—she was tired of being an honest country girl; she didn't want to marry an honest man in order to live luxuriously when she could live luxuriously without—"

She stopped suddenly and a look of annoyance crossed her dark face.

Carnes looked up, and a smile, soft, slow, full of admiration, greeted her somewhat inquiring gaze.

"Madam," he said, his tone almost caressing, "how kind you are! how sensible, at the expense of your feelings—for I know you feel keenly. You have indicated



to me the direction my search must take. Thank you, my dear Mrs. Warham, *thank you.*"

And his hand traced in the little note-book one word: "*Hot.*"

For a few moments there was silence between them, the woman intently scanning the face of the detective, while he sat looking listlessly down at a huge green bow that adorned the front of her gown. Then he drew himself erect in his chair, and assuming a business-like manner asked briskly:

"Madam, would it not be well to advertise?"

Mrs. Warham pushed back her chair with a quick movement, and stood erect before him, her sharp eyes staring down into his face, her thin lips compressed and twitching; her nostrils were quivering, her whole attitude and expression speaking as plainly as words could have done, the thought that was almost on her lips. Had the chief of police, after all her efforts to impress upon his mind the importance of her case, sent her an inefficient man? Something in the quiet gaze of her interrogator recalled her to herself; she turned her head, first to one side then to the other, moistened her lips with her tongue, and sank back into her seat.

A slow smile was creeping up from the lips and into the eyes of Carnes, but he retained his careless posture, and only said very quietly:

"I see—you don't approve of it."

Her answer came slowly and with a visible effort to seem calm. "After what I have *said*, you must see that it would frighten her out of the city—if she is in it."

"Frighten her?"

"Why not? If she ran away from home she will hardly be anxious to be found, and taken back, so soon."

Carnes closed his half-opened note-book and came suddenly to his feet.

"Madam," he said, "how long have you been in the city?"

"Three days."

"Did you come here alone."

"Certainly—why do you ask?"

"Have you any relatives or friends here?"

"No."

"Any acquaintances—think please, *any* one whom you know."

She looked at him fixedly, then—

"If there is a person in this city that I know, or that knows me," she said, "I am not aware of it."

"Thank you." The note-book was open—the pencil at his lips. "Now Mrs. Warham, what is the name of the young man who was jilted by Miss Warham—the young man whom you favored, and your husband disapproved of?"

She started violently.

"Why do you ask for *his* name," she asked with some agitation.

"A mere matter of form," he replied carelessly. "The name, please."

The tip of his pencil touched the open note-book; his eyes, very alert now, rested full upon her face.

"His name was Larsen—Joseph Larsen."

His pencil scrawled the name while he said:

"And the other—the husband that was to be? I—forget—"

"He!" there was evident relief in her tone. "Oh! his name was March, Jackson March."

He wrote the name rapidly, then turned toward the door. "I'll think this business out to-night" he said, taking up his hat, "And I'll see you again—say to-morrow at this same hour."

A smile flitted across her face. She had been startled and now could not conceal a look of relief.

But Carnes had yet to make his grand *coup*. While he was slowly drawing on his glove his eyes roved about the room. "You must find it dull here," he said. "This is a quiet house. Do you read?"

"A little—I must get some books."

"Ah yes; the newspapers are dull reading these quiet times," buttoning his glove carefully. "Shall I leave you my morning papers? they are not very entertaining."

"Oh!" she said, "I seldom read a newspaper; I have not seen one since I came to town."

"Ah! well—by the way madam how does this—this Mr.—Joseph Larsen"—referring to his note-book—"look what's his style?"

The look of annoyance was back in her face as she answered hesitatingly.

"I—I'm afraid I can't give you much of an idea of him; I'm not good at description."

"Ah—well its not important," he said carelessly. "I may think it best to visit your place, and can see him there."

The woman's dark face paled.

"Why—"she began, then checked herself and said, "I don't think you will find him there; he left the place nearly two months ago."

"Oh!" said the detective. "*Really!*" and then he bowed himself out, leaving Mrs. Warham standing in the middle of the room, anxiety, perplexity, and rising anger, in her face.

"I wish I had never seen him!" she muttered; "I can't understand the fellow!"

And Rufus Carnes, strolling away from the dingy hotel muttered to himself:

"The old cat! what is her little game? That she



hates this missing girl is clear. I believe that she wishes her ill, and am not at all sure, in spite of her pretense to the contrary, that she *wants* to find her. I'm not sure, Mrs. Lucretia Warham, that you don't need a little watching yourself. You've put some odd ideas into my head, my dear madam."

## CHAPTER XV

### "IT WAS A GAL"

When Rufus Carnes left the presence of Mrs. Warham, he went straight to his hotel.

"Anyone asked for me?" he inquired of the clerk, who from long acquaintance had learned to know his peculiarities and humor his *brusquerie*.

"Not a soul," answered that functionary.

"Well, I'm looking for a caller soon; send him up."

"All right," answered the clerk, and Carnes passed on to his own room.

Five minutes later a slender lad with a pale face, watery blue eyes and a sleepy look, entered the office and approached the desk. The place was almost empty, only the clerk behind the desk and a porter near it, with two commercial travelers talking trade in a remote corner; but the boy spoke softly, and glanced hesitatingly around as he asked, after casting an anxious look at an envelope which he clutched with both hands, working his lips meanwhile as if spelling out what was written thereon—

"Mr.—Mr. Ca-r-nes, Carnes stop here?"

"Yes," said the clerk with a grin.

"Got a letter for him," drawled the boy.

"All right," the grin became malicious. "Jimmy, take that letter up to Mr. Carnes."

The porter turned in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Ain't you got any bell-boys?" asked the lad, seeming

to rouse himself. "Cause if ye ain't, I'll take it myself. I'm to wait for an answer anyhow."

"Oh, ho!" said the clerk, "you're not so slow as you look! Do you want that note sent up?"

"N—no. I guess I'll take it this once—which way?"

"Number 40—next floor," replied the clerk grinning again, "don't get lost, bubby."

"Thanky," said the boy as he moved off, looking curiously about him, as if seeking the way.

"'Taint no use to 'taffy' one of Carnes' boys," said the porter as he resumed his work; "they ain't slow."

"That's so!" said the clerk good-naturedly, and turned again to his books.

"Come in," cried Carnes, in response to a tap upon the door of number 40. "Hello, Patsy, is that you?"

"I guess so," answered the boy, closing the door while speaking; "don't it look like me?" and he crossed the room and seated himself opposite Carnes with a business-like air, that was ludicrously in contrast with his general appearance.

"What's that?" queried the detective, glancing at the letter in his hand.

"Oh!" said the lad inconsequently, "that? Why it's the letter I brought ye. Got to wait for an answer."

Carnes laughed, and removed a crooked pipe from between his lips.

"Did you write it, Patsy?" he asked carelessly.

"It ain't writ," dextrously removing the envelope. "And here's the answer all ready. *That* ain't writ either; didn't like to waste paper."

Carnes chuckled and bent forward to slap the boy upon his knee.

"Patsy, you'll be a police captain yet—or something worse. What have you done?"

"Well, I dunno," said Patsy reflectively. "I've winded myself for one thing."



"Had a run, Pat?"

"Run! Why I've been a doggin' that feller ever since you set me on! I never see such a chap!"

Carnes leaned across the table near his elbow and took a tobacco-case from the further side.

"Out with it Patsy," he said as he began to refill his pipe. "That is, if you've got back your breath."

"Oh, I've got breath enough now!" laughed the boy, as he watched the leisurely movements of the detective with evident admiration. "I took my time comin' down from the home-run—*Burke's Novelty*."

"Burke's Novelty?"

"Yes, that's where I left him."

"Oh!" lighting his pipe and giving a vigorous pull. "Well! now we're all ready Patsy. One—two—three—go!"

"When you set me on," began the boy, drawing one foot under him and caressing the opposite knee with both hands, "I thought I had mighty little to do. He looked pretty fair to begin with, standin' amongst the rest waitin' for his turn at the window, but when he got there, at last, and didn't get any letter, he walked off looking mighty glum. He went pokin' slowly along with his head kind 'r down and one hand in his breeches pocket, but the other hand was hangin' straight down, and I tell ye what, it purty near could talk. The fingers kept a clawin' and openin' an shuttin' jest like this—"

Here Patsy slid from his chair, and standing before the detective with one fist inserted in a pocket of his trousers, he dropped the other at his side and put it through a series of digital gymnastics that caused Carnes to laugh outright.

"That was pretty plain finger talk, Patsy," he said; "what idea did you get from it?"

"Umph!" replied the boy, resuming his seat and his

former attitude. "I got the idea that he was a pretty mad man; and that he had to let a little of his mad leak out somewhere. But I got used to that business, for he kept it up, off and on, all day."

"What—the finger business?"

"Yes. After he'd gone a little way south from the 'Owl' office something seemed to call him to himself. I'd a notion that some boys he was passin', give him some chaff about it. I wasn't nigh enough to hear, for all at once he snapped his fist shut like that," suiting the action to the word, "and stuffed it into his other pocket, and hurried up his walk a little."

Here the narrator paused and looked slowly about the room.

"So," said Carnes serenely, "he hurried up his walk, did he? Drive on Pat."

"After that," resumed the boy, "he went on seemin' as if he kind of watched himself, and lookin' back every now and then as if he half suspected somebody was follerin' him, but he didn't get onto *me*."

"No," said Carnes encouragingly, "of course not."

"Well sir—" with a smile of gratification, "if you guessed all summer you couldn't call the turn on what that chap did next."

"No?" said Carnes, leaning back in his chair with eyes closed and clouds of smoke issuing from his smiling mouth, "I suppose I couldn't. Hurry up Pat—I'm getting interested!"

"Well, sir, he jest went around amongst the hackmen, city hacks, depot hacks, all sorts, half a dozen different stands; I thought he'd never let up."

Patsy paused to note the effect of his words, but Carnes smoked on in tranquil silence.

"He did the same thing with every one of 'em," the boy went on, "talkin' low and makin' motions with them

crazy hands of his; sometimes I got where I seen his face and it looked pretty anxious an' serious; the fellows all seemed to know him too, an' some of 'em that was settin' on their boxes climbed down when they see him comin'; and before he left 'em he did the same thing by every man of 'em—he give 'em all a fotygraff."

"Eh!" ejaculated Carnes, starting suddenly forward, "what's that, Patsy?—he gave them a photograph? Are you *sure*?"

"Well," returned the lad, looking somewhat aggrieved, "I'm as sure as *you* could 'a' been in my place. At first I thought it was cards he was passin' around so free; but at about the third or fourth one I got pretty close an' as the cabby took it, I noticed him lookin' at it long end up, an' thinks I, it's a picter. I had been a dodgin' considerable, now one side the street an' then t'other, an' next in the middle of it; now ahead of him, an' then behind; but the next chap as he interviewed, I dropped quite a ways behind him, and when I seen him begin to go inter his pocket, I jest squared my toes and licked into a keen run; by the time I had got up to 'em, he was passin' the picter slow like, over to cabby, and I sort a stumbled and fell right amongst their legs, an' the feller threw out his hand with the picter in it, an' as I rolled over I seen it *square*." Here he paused and looked triumphantly at Carnes.

"Well!" cried Carnes eagerly; "you saw it—*what* did you see?"

Patsy moistened his lips with his tongue, passed the back of his hand across his mouth and said:

"*It was a gal.*"



## CHAPTER XVI

### A BITE AT THE BAIT

"You're sure that it was a girl's, a woman's picture, Pat?" asked Carnes as if in doubt, and rising from his chair. "Do you think you would know it if you saw it again?"

Patsy reflected:

"Wal I ain't sure I could identify the picter," he said finally, "but I'm sure 'twas a gal's picter."

The detective crossed the room, and opening a desk, stood for some moments with his back to the boy, seeming to search for something in the various drawers and pigeon-holes; then he returned to his place and tossed a handful of photographs down upon the table.

"Look them over, Pat," he said carelessly, "and see if there's one among them that looks in the least like the picture you saw."

The boy turned the cards over carefully, looking closely at some and tossing others aside after a single glance; at last he came to one over which he hesitated, then suddenly he turned to Carnes and held the picture toward him.

"Hold it up, Cap.," he said, "about as that feller did."

Carnes took the picture and held it aloft, turning and shifting it while the boy lowered his head, raised it, squinted, ducked and peered, all the time keeping his gaze upon the moving picture. Then he jumped to his feet.

"That's about it," he said, "*that* might be the very picter."

Carnes tossed the picture back among the rest, and a queer smile flitted across his face, seeming to fade into the indrawn corners of his mouth; Patsy had identified the picture of *Bertha Warham*.

"Well, we will drop the subject of the picture for the present," said Carnes. "Now Pat, about these hackmen; did you nail them?"

"I did my pertyest," said Patsy, "but I couldn't make sure of all the numbers. They was all sorts you see, an' I had ter note 'em down on the run; but I can point ye out every man of 'em, an' I tell ye they're a tuff lot."

"Did you know any of them?"

"Wal. *Not* to say I'm *acquainted*, but I guess *you'll* know some of 'em; they're the sort that the police mostly keeps an eye on."

"Umph!" grunted the detective, then, "where did he go next, Patrick?"

"Wal—it was gittin' along to noon by the time he had got done with the cabbyies' an' then he went to the Brown."

Carnes started.

"To the *Brown*, Patrick!"

"Yes, sir, that dingy-lookin' place where most of the dizzies put up; close to the L— Street depot."

"I know! Umph! go on Patsy."

"Wal—he went in there an' had some hash, an' while he was eatin' I got somethin' at a corner an' jest layed for him. Perty soon a bell-boy come outside an' stood gawpin' around; then I kind a pulled out a bunch of cigarettes an' begun to light one; that took his eye. an' then I pertended to notice him for the first."

"'Hello, buttons,' says I. 'Hello you,' says he, lookin' right at the cigarettes. Then I begun to chaff him and perty soon we was both smokin' as socherable as ye please. I had just got him goin' about our man when he was

called in, but I had found out this much: he'd been there jest a day, an' he was goin' away after dinner; wal—I stuck around an' purty soon out comes our man with a grip in each hand an' he struck off down the street. Then I comes up behind him an' says I, 'Carry yer sachel to ther depot, Mr.' He stared, kind o' nervous-like, and looked me over perty careful; finally he handed me one of the grips, and told me to trot on ahead of him, to the Bowers House. That's another of 'em ye know; somethin' like the Brown, only more so."

"Yes, yes!" said Carnes nodding, "I know!"

"Well, on the way we passed the Novelty, and I'm blessed if that feller didn't drive me in ahead of him, and buy a ticket fer the matinee."

"Did you hear what he asked for, Pat?"

"Front row balcony," replied the boy promptly. "Wal—went on to the Bowers, an' he took away the grip at the office door, but I seen him register and foller a boy upstairs to his room, I s'pose. Then I waited to see if he went back to the Novelty. He came down in less un ten minutes an' when I'd seen him inside the theater I come down here."

"Patsy," said Carnes, rising with alacrity, "you have done well. Here," tossing him a piece of money, "go down and get yourself some luncheon; I'll join you at the corner in twenty minutes; we have got a little daylight left, and we will take a hack and go around among these cabbies. There!" patting him on the shoulder, "get along lively now. Your a little trump, Patsy."

"Thanky, boss," replied the boy, and he went out grinning with delight.

"Well?" queried the clerk as he sauntered through the office, "did you manage to find the gentleman, sonny?"

"Ya'as—" drawled Patsy, "I made out," and favoring the smiling clerk with a wink and a grin he went on his way.



An hour later, while Carnes and the boy—the former gotten up to look like a slow, and somewhat dull, hackman—were sitting upon the box of a carriage, which stood among others near one of the city's thronged railway stations, a sedate, clerical-looking young man walked slowly past them, lifted his gaze to the box, and, for just a moment, encountered the eyes of the seeming hackman. Then the clerical-looking young man made an almost imperceptible gesture and passed on.

"Patsy," said Carnes, still sitting immovable upon the box, "do you take these ribbons for half a minute; I want to look after a fellow who is going to take the train—"

In another moment he was hurrying after the slow-moving, sedate young man, who was just passing under an arched entrance.

"Dick!"

It was only a whisper, but the young man heard it, and turned quickly—

"Hallo, old man," he said joyously, "I thought you would see me. Got a new job?"

"Yes," smiled Carnes. "Carriage, sur?"

"Carnes," said the other earnestly, "I wish I had more time. I've got to board this northward bound train in three minutes."

"Confound it! where to, Dick?"

"Oh, some remote country town. It's a trip in the dark. Colton is sending me."

"Colton—bank?"

"Yes, the banker. One of his clients, depositors, stockholders, something, has wired him asking him to send down a detective to—what *is* the place?" and he made a movement toward his pocket.

"Never mind, Stanhope, when shall you come back?"

"Don't know—don't know what it's all about. At the old hotel, Carnes?"

"Yes, same old place. They've got to know me and my ways and they are close-mouthed fellows. I come and go comfortably there, they know their business."

"Well, that's the thing. I'll look you up there, Carnes, when I come back."

"Good enough! Hope you'll find me. Eh! there's your bell, Dick; good luck, old man!"

"Same to you, good-bye," and with the words on his lips he vanished in the hurrying throng.

At dusk Carnes and the boy, Patsy, still sitting upon the box of their hired carriage, were driving slowly stableward.

"What will I do next, boss?" queried the boy as they neared their destination.

"Eat a good supper and go to bed, Pat, I'll take care of our man this evening. To-morrow you may be at the Bowers, and track him through the day. I think it'll be the same thing over again."

"What!" queried Patsy. "The '*Owl*', the cabbies, and the theayter?"

"Yes, with perhaps another hotel."

"My eye!" ejaculated Pat. "He's a rum un!"

"I agree with you, Patrick. Now, listen; if he changes his hotel to-morrow, you may see him settled, then come straight to me. Do you see?"

"Yes, boss."

"I'll remain in my room all day, up to four o'clock, Pat. Here we are; hop down now and scamper."

That evening Carnes wrote a note to Mrs. Warham; it was a very simple note, and short, but it cost the detective a half-hour of serious reflection.

Thus it ran:

"DEAR MADAM--There is very little to report to-day--simply that I have made a beginning, acting upon the

hint given by you. It will take some time to exhaust this source of information, and, unless in the meantime I make some actual discovery, it will be as well if we do not meet. You, of course, do not desire to have your business known, and have no wish to attract too much attention to yourself. One question I failed to ask—that is: how long shall you remain in this city? It is important that I consult you *once* more at least before you go.

"Respectfully,

R. F. CARNES."

"O.— Home. May 12th, 18——"

This note as may be surmised reposed upon the desk of the detective until noon of the day following, at which time he dispatched it by a trusted messenger.

He had assured himself, by scanning the columns of the morning '*Owl*,' that the programme of the previous day was to be repeated, for there he found as on the day before, the advertisement for missing Bertha Warham. Patsy was at the heels of the 'rum un', and Carnes feeling no uneasiness with this active urchin in the field, passed his morning in luxurious idleness, lounging, smoking, scanning the morning papers, and humming fragments of melody that were rhythmic, rather than classical.

A little to his surprise the messenger who had waited upon Mrs. Warham with the detective's letter returned in a state of fatigue and with shortened breathing that indicated beyond need of explanation the haste in which he had come. He brought a note from Mrs. Warham and laid it breathlessly in the hand outstretched to take it.

"Umph!" muttered Carnes under his breath as he tore open the envelope. "She has taken the bait, *of course!*"

But this is all that the note contained—



*"I have just made a startling discovery. Come at once.  
"L. W."*

While he yet meditated over this mysterious message, Patsy presented himself, and the detective's face brightened.

"Ah, Patsy," he said; "you're in the nick o' time;" twisting the note into a cigar-lighter, then untwisting it and putting it carefully in his pocket. "What's the news, boy?"

"He's moved," said Patsy, seating himself as on the previous day.

"Moved, has he? Where now?"

"Galloway House, way over on K— Street."

"Oh—ho! The Galloway! well, Pat?"

"He went to the 'Owl', fust thing—"

"Of course!" impatiently.

"Then to the cabbies, jest the same deal only not the fotygraff—"

"Yes."

"He seemed to take things a little easier; gettin' used to it, I s'pose."

"I suppose so. Hurry up, Pat."

"Next he went straight to the Bowers, settled his bill, an' took a hack to the Galloway."

"Oh, ho!"

"When I seen him go in to dinner," concluded Patsy, "I made tracks for here 'cordin' to 'orders."

"Well done, my boy. Now go back even faster than you came, and see if you can't catch him before he comes from dinner. Keep at his heels until six o'clock, supper time. I will relieve you then. Can you hold out, Pat?"

"Oh, I'm fresh to-day, cap'n! I'll hang to him—day," and Patsy was gone.

"Now," said Carnes, turning briskly to a large wardrobe, "for the Warham and her great discovery. I thought the fish would bite!"

Opening the wardrobe he began a rapid but careful toilet, deftly transforming himself into the fop of yesterday.

"Confound it!" he sighed half-aloud, as he turned away from his mirror, "I wish Dick had not left the city just now. I'm quite likely to need him."

## CHAPTER XVII

### SOWING THE WIND

When Rufus Carnes, once more in the character of an elderly fop, appeared for the second time before Mrs. Warham, she saw in him the same unruffled, smiling suavity, met the same glance, half-respect, half-admiration, and heard the same deferential confidence in his tone.

But he saw a new woman.

The gorgeous toilet of the day before was still gorgeous, but the crown of ill-matched hair was disheveled, the silken frills were awry; the sallow countenance glowered upon him, rendered more somber by the total absence of the softening tints of rouge and pearl powder; the eyes gleamed and glowered and wavered; the mouth and nostrils twitched, the hands and feet were unconsciously restless. Under the stress of some new and strong emotion, Mrs. Warham had forgotten—Mrs. Warham. The detective saw all this at a glance, but his tone was one of anxiety, not for the news she might have to impart, but for the woman herself. As he stood bowing before her, this was his mental comment:

"Ah! I have her now!"

But aloud he said: "My dear lady, something has annoyed or displeased you. I hope there is no bad news?"

The woman was striving visibly for self-control; but her hands shook as she held out to him a copy of the "*Morning Owl*." "Read that," she said, indicating the paragraph with a quivering forefinger.



Carnes glanced at the paper and then back to the face of the woman.

"I have seen that," he said quietly.

Her eyes flamed.

"You—you have *seen*—you? did *you* put that in the paper?"

"I! Oh no, madam," elevating his eyebrows in surprise. "I supposed it to be *your* advertisement."

"Mine! *My* advertisement! Why, *why*, I would put my fingers in the fire first!"

Carnes closed his eyes, the corners of his lips were compressed, but he said nothing. Her mood pleased him; he waited for her to speak again.

"How do we know," she went on after a brief silence, "what mischief this will do, at this time? Has this been in other papers—has it?"

"No," said Carnes softly. "Only in the '*Owl*.'"

"It must not be printed again. It must be stopped."

"It was in yesterday's paper;" his voice still soft, his eyes upon the carpet.

"In *yesterday's*—and you did not tell me!"

Suddenly his eyes lifted and rested full upon her face, and, gradually, as he spoke, her own eyes ceased their roving, the flame died out of them and they shifted from his face to the floor.

"Madam," he said with slow, soft impressiveness, "this is the result of half-confidences. Naturally, I supposed you to have been the author of these advertisements; now, if they had been yours, let me show you how worse than useless concealment would have been. Yesterday I gave you the opportunity to tell me everything; you evaded some of my questions; when I left you I took measures to find out, at once, if that advertisement *were* yours."

"Well!" she ejaculated breathlessly.

'I found that it was not; some one besides ourselves is searching for your step-daughter.'

"Who is it?" she almost hissed. "Do you know who it is?"

"It is a man. I did not learn his name."

Mrs. Warham began to pace the floor hurriedly—she seemed to have forgotten his presence. Then suddenly she stopped and turned toward him.

"How did you find this out—about this notice—this man?" she asked abruptly.

"Simply enough. I inquired at the '*Owl*' office."

"And they told you—"

"That it was a man who gave them that advertisement; it came in at the window devoted to the use of gentlemen."

She resumed her walk, her agitation increasing. The detective watched her furtively; his face was expressionless.

Finally she halted and again faced him.

"What are you going to do about this?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"Nothing!" she seated herself opposite him and looked at him with eager eyes. "*Nothing!* what does that mean?"

"Once before," said Carnes slowly, and fixing his calm gaze again upon her face, "I told you that to succeed, I must have your help. You are not helping me."

"I?—"

"On the contrary you are hindering me

"I don't—"

"You will not see this matter in its proper light. If I were your lawyer and you eager to win a case you would hold nothing back; you would tell me everything even to the extent of criminating yourself; you would see that it was *my* business to make black appear white, if need

be, not yours. With a detective even more than with a lawyer it is necessary to have no concealments. I am working for *you*, in *your* interest; you must tell me all that I need to know or—I must drop this case."

"I—I don't understand;" the woman's eyes had been slowly traveling from the furniture to his face, from his face to the floor.

"Pardon me. You are anything but obtuse. I am going to ask some questions. Whether I continue this search or not will depend upon your answers. And—keep this in mind, all that you tell me is under the seal of secrecy. If I drop your case I shall *forget* it and you. That is my business. Now—are we ready?"

Her hands were clinched in her lap, her eyes still studied the carpet. She was biting at her under lip.

"Yes," she said sullenly. "Begin."

"First then do you *want* to find Bertha Warham?"

"Yes."

"And you do not want this other—this man to find her?"

"No."

"Why?"

Her lips closed in a hard pale line; her hands clutched at each other.

"Can't you understand?" she said lifting her eyes to his face. "I want to be the one to find her."

"Ah!" said Carnes softly and fixing her eyes with his own, "*Why*, Mrs. Warham?"

The dark blood mounted to her face. Her eyes wavered, fell, rose again and met his defiantly.

"I consider this unnecessary," she said.

"*I am the judge, madam, it is necessary—absolutely so.*"

Again her eyes wandered, the convulsive movements repeated themselves. Watching her from beneath his half-closed lids, Carnes knew that she longed to rebel.



At last her resolve seemed to be taken; she sat straight before him and her restlessness ceased; she unclasped her hands and placed them upon either arm of the easy-chair in which she had seated herself.

"I am going to tell you my story over again," she said slowly, her mouth setting into hard lines. "I think you will understand my meaning this time."

He gave her a nod of approval.

"Ah!" he murmured, "I was sure that you would not disappoint me."

Evidently Mrs. Warham had made up her mind, but if Carnes had hoped for details he was doomed to disappointment.

"When I married Mr. Warham," she began, "I was alone in the world, free, independent and with a small property, enough at least for my own comfort as long as I might live. Everything went smoothly. Mr. Warham was an easy man in the main, until the girls grew up, and I had little trouble with any of them except Bertha. She never liked me, and several little things happened during her school days which made her dislike increase. I tried to keep her from doing imprudent things, and from various extravagances, and she would not be controlled. To make things worse she began to exercise a strange influence over her father, and to use it against me. I had a sister married and living near us and I was very fond of her—her son. He was a fine boy and he and Bertha grew up playmates. We all thought them a nice little couple and had made up our minds to see them married some day, and we had this understanding among us: I was to leave the boy all that I had, and Mr. Warham was to portion Bertha, giving her as much as I gave to the boy. But as they grew older Bertha grew flighty and headstrong, not in the least like her sisters; she must be sent to the best schools or none; she learned easily and began

soon to look down upon us all; she jilted poor Joe and snubbed him unmercifully, and all the while he worshiped her; she wound her father right around her little finger; you would have thought she was the head of the house. Finally we persuaded her to marry the man I told you of and try to settle down; well you may know how it ended, and now after I have nursed her father through a long sickness, he turns upon me and says that / am to blame for Bertha's flight. I never saw a man so changed; he had made his will leaving me half his property, and only last week he tore it to tatters before my eyes, and said that he would not leave me a farthing beyond what the law would give me until I found that girl and brought her back."

"Is that all?"

"No!" her face flushing hotly, sudden impetuosity in her voice. "Joe—my—my sister's boy has turned upon me too. *He* thinks I am to blame—the foolish fellow would marry her yet if she would come back and have him," here her eyes gleamed, her resentment seemed rising. "I want to find her," she exclaimed. "I want no one else to interfere. You know what I think—" breaking off suddenly as if fearing the effect of her words upon her listener.

Carnes leaned toward her, one hand with wrist turned outward resting jauntily on his knee, the other, palm up-lifted, extended toward her.

"I know what you mean," he said slowly. "You want this girl found; and if she is found under humiliating circumstances, surrounded by shame, a sinner among sinners, it will be the better for *you*; it will enable you to say to your husband and your nephew: 'See! did I not tell you she has *not* been injured by me? The wrong lay within herself; she has followed the dictates of a depraved nature.' to find her thus will be to destroy your husband's confidence in her; to restore his confidence in

you, and to effectually cure this youth, whose interests you seem to have at heart, of his infatuation. Is not that your meaning, madam?"

His eyes held hers, his lips smiled, his whole attitude invited confidence; he seemed to admire, rather than to deprecate the motive imputed to her.

With her eyes still held by his, she hesitated, opened her lips, closed them again, and moved restlessly.

But Carnes retained his vantage-ground.

"This being the state of your mind, I know now how to proceed," he said. "Now tell me, madam, when I find—this girl, what shall be my next move?"

She was off her guard. He spoke of finding Bertha Warham as of a thing assured, and for the first time she spoke impulsively, without hesitation.

"When you find her," she said eagerly, "come straight to me. She must not know *you*; when you find her, watch her night and day. I want to show them both—the truth."

"I see. You want no alarm given; you want her father and her lover to see with their own eyes; to know the truth as *you* know it?"

"Yes," she said quickly. "Yes, yes."

He arose and took up his hat.

"Have you any idea about this advertisement," he asked. "Can you guess whom the advertiser may be?"

She arose and came forward, standing straight and tall before him, her face on a level with his.

"I think it is her father," she said.

"Is he well enough to come to the city?"

"Oh, not in person. But he talked, before I offered to come in person, of sending to a friend, a banker, in fact to get his advice and assistance."

"Why to a banker?"

"Because he knows him well and believes him to be shrewd and capable."



"Do *you* know this person?"

"No."

"Did you ever see him, or he you?"

"No, to both questions."

"Do you know the name of the man or the firm?"

She hesitated, seemed to consider, and finally said:

"It is Rouke, I think—Rouke & Colton."

"Oh! ejaculated Carnes. "Rouke & Colton, is it?"

Then suddenly, "Mrs. Warham, where is that young man, your nephew? I forget his name."

She flushed and her fingers worked nervously.

"He is—I don't know where he is," she said hesitatingly. "He left home shortly after his trouble with Bertha. It hurt him terribly—he has only been back once since."

"Back to his home?"

"Back to his home—yes."

"When?"

"About a week after Bertha disappeared."

"Oh! And you can't describe this young man for me?"

Her eyes fell under his direct gaze.

"I can't"—she began, then her tone changing, "wait," she said, "I have his picture."

With a gesture toward the chair he had lately occupied, she passed him and went out, while the detective crossed the room, stood at the broad window, and looked down, murmuring softly, while he accompanied each syllable with a tattoo of finger taps upon the window frame:

"How she hates—this girl. She *don't* understand the advertising business. She's worried about, or anxious for, or afraid of this Mr.—Joseph—Larsen!" Then after a moment, during which the tattoo increased in sound and velocity, he said softly: "There's a full grown, very much alive Ethiopian in the fence, *yet*—my dear Mrs. W—."

Having thus delivered himself, Carnes turned from the window, and when Mrs. Warham entered she found him sitting in the chair she had indicated, looking blankly at the opposite wall.

She came swiftly toward him, and held before him a velvet-framed cabinet photograph.

He took the picture from her hand and bent his head to conceal the quick look of recognition that crossed his face.

There before him was the square head, the overhanging brow, the dark, strong face and curved nose of the young man of the theater, the patron of hackmen and theatrical hotels. While he studied the pictured face, something that he saw there caused him to start and look suddenly up at Mrs. Warham. After another look at the picture he said slowly—deliberately:

"Madam, he looks like *you*."

Then swiftly his eyes were lifted from the picture and rested upon her face. It was ashen, even the lips were gray; but while her hands were clinching each other, his gaze returned to the picture, and he said as if to himself:

"Hum! striking family resemblance; your nephew has your expression rather than your features, madam."

He placed the picture on the table and seemed to forget it. He had formed a new plan.

"How long shall you remain in the city, Mrs. Warham?"

Her voice quivered slightly; she was not quite composed.

"As long as it seems needful," she said.

"Then to-morrow I will wait upon you. Let me see—at this hour; and Mrs. Warham, please wait for me here—we must not make these interviews too conspicuous. At two o'clock, then."

She bowed assent, and, in another moment, the detective was hastening from the hotel, muttering as he went:

"Mrs. Warham, my dear madam, I'll treat you to a surprise to-morrow."

Upon reaching his room once more, he wrote the following note, in a hand as characterless as a school-boy's copy.

"B. 3. 'Owl' Office, City.

"The person who advertised for Bertha Warham may meet one who can give him information, by calling at the Avenue House, G— Street, second-floor parlor, at two o'clock P. M. *to-day*—Friday, May 13th."

"ANON—"

"There," he said as he inclosed this note and pushed it aside, "that goes to-morrow; let us see what the harvest will be."

Ah, Rufus Carnes, keen-witted, astute detective as you are, even you cannot foresee the harvest of death and disaster that will spring from the events of the past two days.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### O'CALAHAN, THE COMEDIAN

At five o'clock of that same day, a flashily-dressed man came swaggering down the street in which stood the Galloway House; he carried in his right hand a jaunty rattan cane, in his left a showy traveling bag; a striped ulster hung across the arm that carried the cane. He wore a suit of "loud" check and rakish cut, somewhat soiled and a little the worse for wear; the coat, held together across his ample chest by a single button, left a large front of waistcoat, and a glittering watch-chain visible; a derby hat worn very much over one ear, gave emphasis to a profusion of auburn curls oiled, scented and so long as to rest upon the collar of his coat, to which they had imparted a smoothness and shine that they did not altogether conceal. His face was smooth-shaven, rubicund, smiling, and self-satisfied. His nose had a convivial tint, and a long scar across the left cheek gave an odd expression to the whole countenance; his eyes, fine orbs in form and color, were encircled by dark shadows, and looked out from his face with a broad stare and an amount of self-confidence that should have been an inspiration to the beholder. His dress, his look, his manner were unmistakable, and as he passed a group of news-boys, sunning themselves and indulging in a momentary bit of "chaff," by way of enlivening their occupation, one of them flung after him this friendly salute:

"Hello, Dizzy. How's walkin'?"

With no sign that he heard unless it might have been an additional flourish of his rattan cane—the new-comer strode on toward the Galloway House.

A few paces away from the open entrance, a ragged boy was sitting upon the curbstone holding upon his knees a boot-black's box, and looking languidly up and down the street. As his eye fell upon the traveler he became animated to the extent of twisting himself around with one knee under him and his face toward the inner walk.

"Want cher boots black, misser?"

The pedestrian stopped suddenly and looked down at his feet, then he thrust a thumb and forefinger into his pocket, clasping the cane with his elbow in order to release a hand; finally he said, slowly and with much dignity:

"Come this way, young fellow," indicating a stairway near the hotel entrance.

"Can't yer stop here?" said the boy without moving.

For answer the jaunty stranger withdrew his fingers from his pocket, released the cane, gave it a significant twirl, and moved toward the stairway, seeing which the boy scrambled to his feet and followed with alacrity.

For a few moments the polishing process went on in silence, the man looking carelessly out upon the street, the boy seeming intent upon his work. Then, as the rumble and din about them swelled into a medley of sound, the man asked, with his eyes still looking streetward:

"How now, Patsy?"

The boy started, looked quickly up, then hurriedly down again.

"Captain," he said, letting his brush rest for a moment, "it's as much as ever that I knew you." Then as his patron remained silent, he looked up again as if to reassure himself, and resuming his work he added: "It's all right, he's in there now."

"Good! Been here all the time, Pat?"

"No, SIR! *That* feller won't never keep still—he's got a new deal."

"Give it to us."

"He's doin' the stalls an' street beggars."

Carnes turned his head and looked up the stairs; then moving a few steps backward he seated himself at the foot of the stairway and said:

"Move up here, boy, and spin your yarn while you do the other foot. Be lively now."

The boy was instantly in his new position, and Carnes, for his jaunty patron was none other, sitting on the step above him, with an elbow resting upon a checkered knee, listened to his story, while seeming to hear nothing, and to see only the street.

"He sailed out a little after noon," began Patsy, "and he went up an' down the business streets with me at his heels. Finally he come to the old woman what keeps the apple stand at the corner, near the new theayter—ye know?"

"Yes."

"Well, he confabbed a while with her, an' then I'm blest if he didn't out with a fotygraff an' pass it over to her, but he didn't let her keep it, like he did the hackmen. After she'd give it a good long lookin' over, he took it back agin, an' we went on. We went next to A—Avenue. Over by 9th there's always a no-legged beggar—"

"Near the theater?" queried Carnes.

"Yes—right close by. Well, he had the same kind of a confab there, an' then he went to two other stands—these were, one of 'em on Pearl and Winter—an old darkey you know—"

Carnes nodded.

"An' the other is that little Italyan by Cottage Court.



'Twas the same deal all round, talkin' a while, then showin' the fotygraff, then off agin."

Carnes pursed up his lips as if to give vent to a prolonged whistle, then they relaxed and he chuckled softly instead. The sound caused Patsy to pause in his work, with brush suspended.

"Pat," said Carnes slowly, and not seeming to notice the boy's movement, "think now; were not these two last stands, the darky—was it a man or woman, eh?"

"Woman;" said Patsy, beginning to polish with vigor. "Pearl an' Winter."

"Yes; yes. Well, was not this woman and the Italian both near some theater?"

"By—jingo!" ejaculated the boy pausing as before. "They was for a fact! Both of 'em. Yes, *all* of 'em."

"Umph! I thought so," said Carnes.

A few moments later our man of striking appearance entered the office of the Galloway House, threw down a heavy sachel, flung his striped ulster across a chair, tilted his derby hat far back upon his head, thrust his rattan cane under his left arm so that the ferrule end projected behind his left ear, and dropped into an attitude negligent but jaunty with his back against a cigar counter.

A coatless clerk who was reading a pamphlet behind his desk moved ostentatiously, laid down the pamphlet and coughed twice.

The stranger crossed one knee over the other, turned his back more squarely upon the clerk, and directed his gaze toward some lithographs of stage celebrities, all more or less yellowed and time-stained that were tacked high up on the opposite wall.

The office was deserted save by the clerk and a small boy who was catching flies near the single window, and the stranger allowed his gaze to wander from one pictured

face to another, seeming oblivious of the presence of even these two.

He had surveyed the array upon the opposite wall, and turned his gaze back to the point where it had at first rested when the clerk made his second demonstration by sliding down from his stool, moving it with a scrape and a clatter, remounting it and fluttering the leaves of a shabby register.

The stranger drew his cane from beneath his arm and setting its polished head against his teeth began to whistle softly. Whereupon a frown settled upon the features of the coatless clerk; he closed the register with a bang, and called sharply to the boy at the window.

"Jim, no more o' that!"

The boy with hands uplifted brought them together so swifly and dextrously that they inclosed a huge blue-bottle, and, still holding his prisoner, turned toward the clerk.

"Huh?"

"I say stop it; we didn't hire ye for a fly-trap."

The boy opened his palm and set the buzzing blue-bottle free.

"All right," said he cheerfully, and began at once to look for a new occupation. The sachel of the indifferent arrival fell under his gaze and he approached it slowly, eyed it critically for a moment, then touched it lightly with his foot. This done he looked up to encounter the gaze of its owner.

"How does it strike you, fly-trap?"

The boy's mouth widened into a grin. He gave the bit of luggage another investigating prod, and then moved nearer the stranger, and said interrogatively:

"Gold bricks?"

The owner of the luggage turned toward the clerk, laughing lightly.

"House pretty full?" he inquired.

"Middling," replied the clerk with dignity.

"Business light now everywhere," went on the stranger imperturbably. "Got many permanents among the 'profesh?'"

"So so," replied the clerk with no sign of unbending.

"Give us a peep at the muster-roll."

The clerk threw back the cover of the register, brushed a layer of dust from that portion of the desk nearest the stranger, and propelled the book toward him.

Settling his two elbows comfortably upon the desk, crossing one leg over the other and arching his back to the curve of a half-moon, the stranger bent his head and studied the pages of the register deliberately and long. Finally, with a shrug as if the result of his investigation were not altogether satisfactory, he reached across the desk for a spluttering pen and wrote beneath the latest entry—

*"Barney O'Calahan, San Francisco."*

This done he pushed aside the register and favored the clerk with a patronizing nod, saying:

"The best room you've got, Cap, and send fly-trap with the grip."

When the *habitués* of the Galloway gathered in the office for their after-supper cigars, they learned that "O'Calahan, the Frisco comique," was a guest of the house, and the intelligence created a stir among them; even the transients were aroused to a considerable display of interest, all but one, and he, sitting apart from the others, seemed not to heed their exclamations, speculations, questions, criticisms.

Evidently this person was not of the "profesh:" there was something almost rustic in his dress and manners. It was a sturdy rusticity however, and not to be trifled with; of this the worldly-wise loungeur, tragedian, come-



dian, minstrel, what-not, assured each other with knowing nods and winks, and cautious side-glances. When Mr. "Barney O'Calahan," in fresh linen, more self-possessed more sailing, more convivial than the most dashing "dizzy" of them all, appeared among them just before the spring-belated evening began to darken, he was welcomed warmly, his smiles returned, his lively sallies laughed at, his cigars smoked, himself openly admired by all save the dark-browed, square-jawed man who sat sturdily in their midst unabashed by their brilliant wit, unawed by their "stage idiom," uninterested, stolid, silent.

He seemed not to note the contrast between himself and them, not to realize or recognize a difference, and when he gruffly declined a cigar which was proffered him by the brilliant Mr. O'Calahan, he followed up, and gave emphasis to his refusal, by drawing from his trousers' pocket a long bar of black tobacco and deliberately biting off a large mouthful.

He had no smiles for their jest, he conversed in monosyllables, and when the gas was lighted and the gentlemen of the profession began to disperse, in search of an evening's entertainment, some to the theaters, some to beer and billiards and others to still more questionable pleasures, this taciturn countryman, repulsing all overtures and patronizing offers of companionship, took his way alone to a theater of the "cheap but popular" order, which if one might judge from the uncertain and cautious manner in which he picked his way thither, he had never before visited; and while the gayety was at its height Barney O'Calahan, serene, smiling and alone, might have been seen, not far away yet not too near, occupying a balcony chair and literally keeping one eye upon the stage and one upon Mr. Joseph Larsen.

## CHAPTER XIX

### DISMISSED

When Rufus Carnes, alias Barney O'Calahan, laid his tired head upon the diminutive and not too downy pillow of the Galloway House, he was in a very contented frame of mind. He was in perfect physical health, had no personal cares or responsibilities to fret him; and he was in the very midst of what he termed "a splendid muddle," a mixture of plot and counterplot, a mystery of which, he felt assured, he as yet scarce knew the beginning.

Concerning the disappearance of Bertha Warham he could hardly be said to have a theory but he had a plan, and a very clearly defined one, by which he hoped to open a way to reach the truth; and as he was, when left to himself, never conservative, but always original and often startling in his methods, he had decided to begin on the morrow with a *coup* sufficiently hazardous, and altogether worthy of himself.

That Mrs. Warham dealt in "half-truths, if not, at some points, whole fabrications, he fully believed. He was convinced also that she had no love for Bertha Warham; and that she was eager to find the girl seemed for this reason almost beyond belief—and yet Carnes did believe it; in fact he had sifted from his interviews with Mrs. Warham all that seemed to him doubtful, worthless, and untrue, and he found as his remainder three ideas, barren and unpromising as helps toward further light, viz:

Bertha Warham was missing.

Bertha Warham's step-mother was Bertha Warham's enemy.

Bertha Warham's step-mother wanted Bertha Warham found.

He was not so sure of Mr. Joseph Larsen, for that the dark-visaged countryman who had advertised in the *Owl* and scattered photographs among the hackmen and street-venders was Joseph Larsen he felt assured, not so much because of the photograph exhibited by Mrs. Warham as by a blunder made by this same Joseph, a blunder often made by persons who attempt for the first time to conceal their identity.

In registering at the various hotels which he had briefly honored by his presence, he had disguised rather than dropped his name, and retaining the initial letters, appeared upon the page John Larkins, instead of Joseph Larsen.

"The fool!" Carnes had muttered upon making this discovery. "They always do it—once—and they always grow wiser before they try again."

To bring about a crisis, and to give himself an opportunity, between the two, to catch some fragment which might lead up to the truth or at least give him a hint upon which to act, Carnes had decided to bring Mrs. Warham and Joseph Larsen face to face; and to be himself present at the meeting.

Just how it would end, he did not attempt to guess. That these two persons, so closely related, and whose interests should be the same, were here upon the same errand, and each ignorant of the other's proximity, seemed to the detective not the least among the peculiarities attendant upon this altogether peculiar case. If Joseph Larsen had been trifled with, and discarded by this missing girl, was it probable that his search was a friendly one?



To guess was folly. To waste time in idle speculation was not in the nature of Rufus Carnes; so leaving till to-morrow what to-morrow would bring he slept dreamlessly.

The letter which was to lure Mr. Joseph Larsen into the presence of Mrs. Warham was safe in the postal department of the morning *Owl*, and when Mr. O'Calahan appeared among the *habitués* of the Galloway House after a late breakfast, he found that he had an entire morning to devote to the Galloway loungers and the morning papers. Joseph Larsen was not visible, but wherever he was, Patsy was sure to be at his heels, and so, as noon approached, Carnes, growing weary of the tame delights of the dingy "Head-quarters of the profesh sir," decided to make a visit to the chief of police.

In a great city it is an easy thing to possess several identities, provided one is equal to the dramatic effort—a pass key, a room in a block, a sufficient wardrobe, and the thing is done. The key, the room, the wardrobe Carnes had always at command, and so just fifty-six minutes after Barney O'Calahan turned his back upon the Galloway, Rufus Carnes opened the door of Captain B—'s office and entered.

The captain was absent, but a letter lay upon his desk addressed to Rufus Carnes, and this was promptly presented by the captain's deputy.

Carnes took it, glanced at the superscription, started slightly, and tore off the wrapper with an impatient hand; as he began its perusal he muttered something unintelligible, a blank look slowly overspreading his face; when his eye had traveled to the bottom of the page he turned, seated himself in the vacant chair and read it again slowly. Then he folded the letter, placed it upon his knee and turned toward the captain's deputy, who,

lacking the captain's *sang froid*, was watching his movements, curiosity in his face.

"Got a match handy."

The deputy started, and then took up a bronze match-receiver and leaned forward to proffer it, the look of curiosity deepening in his face.

But Carnes, never glancing up, took a match, struck it upon the heel of his boot, lighted a black cigar and then, as if by an afterthought turned in his chair and silently proffered his case to the deputy.

There was a long silence in the captain's office, Carnes smoking and watching the white wreaths from his cigar curl upward and disappear, and seeming intent upon nothing else, the deputy smoking and watching him wonderingly.

When his cigar was half consumed, Carnes took it from between his lips, flipped the ashes from the burning end and tossed it out of the window; then he took up the letter and reperused it, his face sphinx-like.

The letter was signed *Lucretia Warham*, and it contained these remarkable sentences:

"MY DEAR MR. CARNES:

"I have just had news which makes the search for B. W. no longer necessary. You need make no further effort. *I know* where to look for her, and before this reaches you I shall be out of the city. Please send your bill for all expenses to the address which you will find below, and accept my thanks for your courtesies.

L. WARHAM."

And then followed this peculiar postscript:

"It will be *positively useless* to agitate this matter further. Too much has been done already; matters *now are comfortably settled.*"

Small wonder that Carnes read this singular document

twice and again; small wonder if his face was a blank; so, for many moments, was his mind. Then slowly, while he folded the letter after its third perusal, his wits began to gather, and what he saw first, was the absurdity of the thing; and while the captain's deputy still gravely gazed, he stored the letter in a capacious pocket-book, and then stretching his arms above his head, indulged in a roar of laughter.

This done he arose and as his eyes met those of the astonished deputy, he said:

"Felix, old fellow, I wish I could share my joke with you, but I can't. When did this precious epistle land?"

"Not half an hour ago," said the deputy, glad of a chance to open his mouth; "just after the captain went out."

"Umph! yes. Where has he gone?"

"The captain?"

"Yes."

"Don't know. Said he would be back at twelve precisely."

"Umph!" grunted Carnes again. "Well, tell him I'll see him to-night, say at six o'clock."

Felix nodded, and Carnes went from the office communing with himself as he walked slowly onward.

"Singular affair this," he thought. "Singular beginning, singular end. *End* indeed! There's somewhat wrong in Denmark. It's easy to cry *stop*, Mrs. Warham. I was *willing* to stop before I began, but I've grown interested. I've a great mind *not* to stop. I *won't stop*. I'll call on you as per programme, Mrs. Warham, and then I'll press the acquaintance of Mr. Joseph Larsen. Wonder if he will withdraw from the track too? Wonder—hallo!—what's up!"

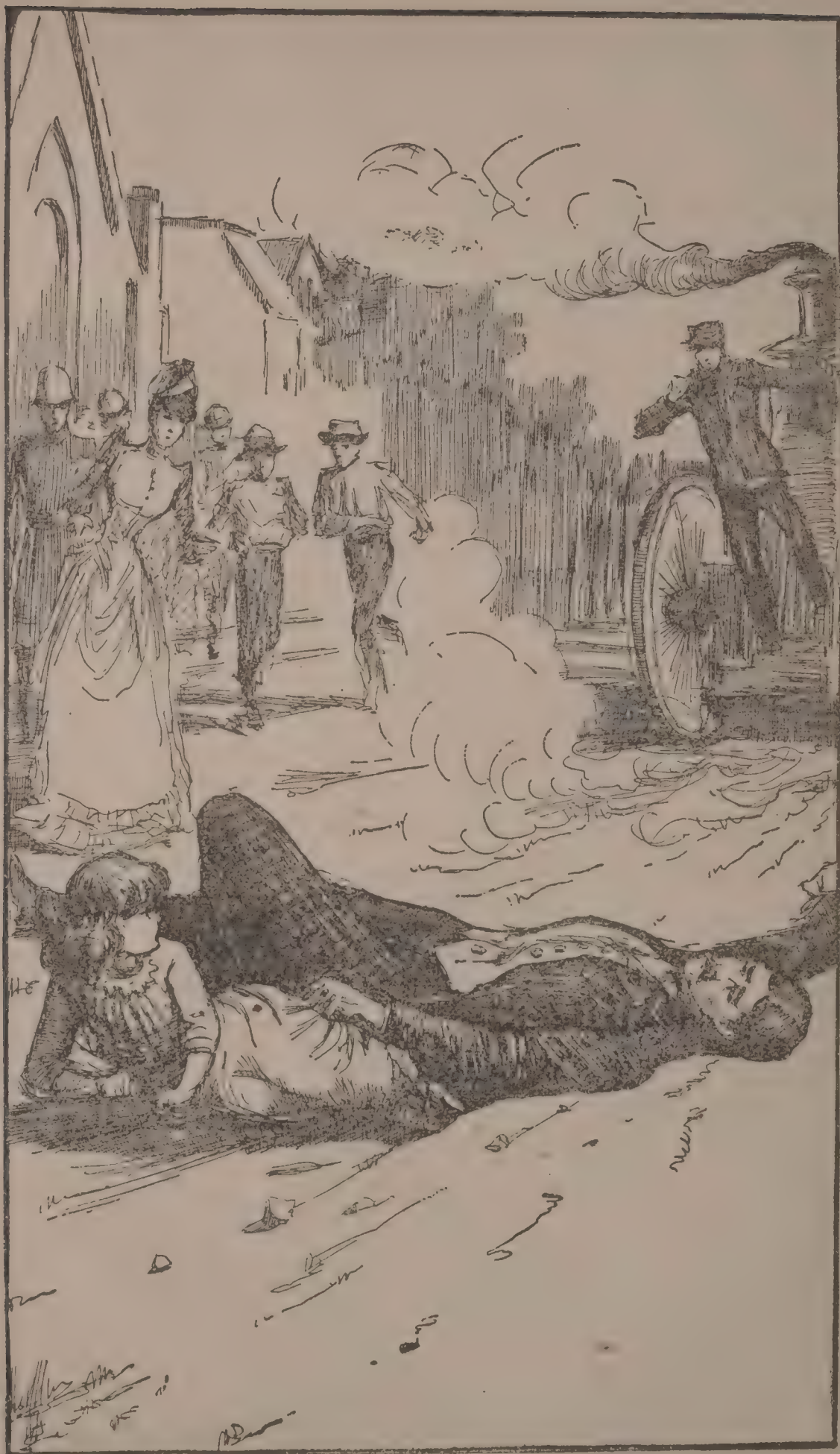
A fire bell near at hand was sounding its alarm. A crowd was gathering about the nearest corner; fire en-



gines and red shirts came flying down the street. Down the street, around the corner rattle, yell, ding-dong.

"Look out—take care!" warning yells, screams of terror, childish screams, and high above the rest, the wail of a woman.

A lithe form, shooting straight from the sidewalk to the middle of the crossing at one bound, it seemed. Then it is over; the engine tears on, rattle and ring; a mother's terror is drowned in tears of joy and thankfulness; a child is rescued at the last moment—snatched from under the feet of the flying horses. It lies unhurt but terrified upon the street, and beside it, one hand still clutching its garments, bleeding and senseless, lies Rufus Carnes.



BESIDE IT, BLEEDING AND SENSELESS, LIES RUFUS CARNES.  
- Slender Clue, p. 180.





## CHAPTER XX

### PATSY OUTGENERALED

They took him up gently and carried him from the street to the pavement. Then a voice in the crowd gave their willing feet and burdened hands a new impetus.

"The nearest drug-store."

Of course, they had all thought of that—and then as they lifted him again, the mischief being done, two policemen came, panting, from opposite directions, and one of them, pressing to the side of the unconscious man, looked down into his bruised and livid face.

"Why!" he exclaimed sharply, "it's Carnes—Rufe Carnes!" and then, following up his tardy arrival with prompt action, he called a carriage, sent for a surgeon, and leaving his brother officer to disperse the gaping crowd, took the injured man straight to his own hotel.

And so it happened that, when later in the day, Patsy presented himself at the door of Carnes' room, with a countenance anxious and troubled, he found the window darkened, a nurse and a physician in possession, two young detectives of the agency from which Carnes had lately withdrawn himself, sitting near the bed, and upon it Rufus Carnes, his head encased in bandages, very pale, sleeping, and breathing heavily.

The hurts were serious, the surgeon said, but not necessarily fatal; if they could ward off all fever symptoms and keep down inflammation, all would be well. The bruises upon the body were only temporary discomforts. The injuries done the head were the ones to look to.

There must be perfect quiet, no talking, nothing to excite or annoy. With these precautions observed, and with careful nursing, the wounds would heal rapidly.

Upon hearing these things Patsy's look of anxiety deepened; he felt upon his shoulders a weight of responsibility, and after some anxious deliberation, he set off for police head-quarters, determined to unburden himself to the chief.

But again he met with disappointment; the chief had returned to his office, shortly after Carnes left it, for one brief moment, to inform his deputy of his immediate departure on a sudden and secret mission, to snatch a bundle of papers from a private drawer, issue some orders and cast a hurried good-bye over his shoulder as he went his way.

"Luck's agin us," muttered Patsy ruefully as he turned his face homeward. "I wish I knowed"—here he stopped suddenly and a maxim often upon the lips of Carnes, crossed his mind.

"When you don't know what to do, do nothing." •

The boy uttered these words half aloud, and then struck his clinched fist upon his hip.

"I don't know what to do," he muttered, "so I'll jest—" here he paused again, struck by a new idea.

"Yes I *do* know though!" his countenance brightening. "I'll try an' keep track o' his business whilst he's dry docked. I'll look sharper'n ever after my man with the fotygrafts. I kin do *that* anyhow," and Patsy hurried on, taking fresh courage and feeling cheered already at the thought that he might still serve his prostrate idol, and perhaps win from his lips that praise which was sweeter to his ears than any other sound on earth, coming from the master who was, in his eyes, a paragon of shrewdness, wisdom and executive ability.

The next morning, "The Owl," conspicuous hitherto

only for its repeated queries after missing Bertha Warham, held other matter of interest to our story. The first item was under this attractive heading:

"A GALLANT DEED.

"On yesterday, the corner of A— and Z— Streets was the scene of more than one sensation. While the fire-alarm was resounding in the block below, and the streets thronged with the usual crowd of fire worshipers, a woman holding by the hand a small and delicate child rashly endeavored to cross Z— Street in advance of the fire engines. At the moment when the horses were upon them, and the fate of the child seemed certain, a man sprang out from the crowd and with one hand wrested the child from underneath the horses' feet, while with the other he clutched for a moment the bridle of the maddened animal nearest him. In another moment he was borne down and trampled under the horses' feet, the child unhurt, and held clear of the horses by a grasp of iron. The gallant fellow was taken up and borne to the nearest place of refuge, and being recognized, proved to be none other than Rufus Carnes, a well-known and very successful detective, who has now added to his long list of daring deeds, this last disinterested piece of gallantry, which leaves him seriously if not fatally hurt, and deprives the public of his active services, so it is to be feared, for a considerable time."

As it was nearing noon, the clerk behind the desk in the office of the little home hotel where Carnes lay in a drugged quiet, looked up as a shadow fell across the big register to see a stranger, his face half-hidden under a slouch hat, and his form buttoned into a high-necked linen duster, standing before the desk and very close to himself.

The eyes of the stranger were fixed upon him, and he



returned the gaze with a look of inquiry and a slight gesture.

"Is—a, the gentleman—the gentleman who was hurt yesterday, stopping here?"

Now the clerk had been answering this and similar questions at intervals during the entire morning, and from constant repetition his replies, to his own ears, sounded very monotonous. So he simply nodded and looked slightly bored.

"Is—is he much hurt?"

"Pretty badly hurt," said the clerk, looking over the stranger's shoulder to where the boy, Patsy, who had just entered, had taken a position with his back toward the stranger and his eyes seemingly riveted upon a placard on the wall.

"Does he see anyone—visitors?" persisted the stranger.

"No *sir*. Against the doctor's orders. Can't talk—can't be talked to."

"Do—do you think that he might in an important matter, be able to answer a few questions?"

"No *sir*," said the clerk positively. "He has not spoken a word since he was hurt, and he won't. There'll be no business affairs brought near him *now*. He's too low down for that."

"I'm sorry for that," said the stranger; "I—I really hoped it wasn't so serious," and he nodded to the clerk and turned from the desk.

When he was outside the office, the boy Patsy wheeled sharply and shot an angry glance at the clerk.

"You're a *dandy*, you are!" he said in a savage half-whisper. "You *think* your smart! an' you've gone and told that fellow the very thing he was achin' ter hear."

And Patsy darted out of the office and across the street, where he resumed his self-imposed task of dogging the slouch hat and buttoned-up duster that half-

concealed the personality of Joseph Larsen whom Patsy had chosen to dub "The man with the photographs."

All day the boy kept his post. It was the usual routine among the hackmen and the street-venders, but when these had been left behind his work grew tedious.

"The man with the photographs," dined at the Galloway House and sat for an hour in the office, chewing a lump of tobacco, and staring moodily down at the dirty floor; then he went out upon the street, looked up and down and finally took the way to the nearest book-store where he bought a map of the city, and then returned to his hotel.

Without stopping, or looking back, the man with the photographs went straight to his room, and Patsy lounging outside began to yawn and grow sleepy. For two long hours he lingered about the place, now up the street, now down, now on one side, now on the other, raising here and there the cry of the boot-black, always avoiding and always seeming to seek patronage. Finally he coiled himself up in the stairway, where two days before he had polished the boots of Mr. Barney O'Callahan, who by the by, was mysteriously missing from the Galloway, and here he fell fast asleep.

He slept for nearly half an hour and then awoke with a start, to find himself roughly jostled by a man who was hurrying up the stairs.

Half-awake, Patsy bounded out from the stairway and hurried to the office window. To his great joy the man with the photographs sat in the office reading a newspaper and looking more composed and at ease than Patsy remembered to have seen him. Thus much the office window showed; what it did not show, was a dark valise on the floor at the feet of the man with the photographs, with a summer overcoat lying across it.

"He's there," murmured the boy with a sigh of relief.

"An' I'll hang to him. Wonder if he's goin to settle at this 'ere place?"

The afternoon passed, Patsy saw his man enter the supper room, come out again and resume his seat near the window. He sat now with his face toward the street, his hands in his pockets, his hat drawn low over his face. It was growing dusk; the hurry and pressure of travel increased. Patsy found himself jostled from his latest post of observation, and giving the strap of his "apparatus" an ostentatious hitch over his shoulder, he walked a few paces down the street crying his trade—

"Blackyer-boots; bla-a-a-ak.——"

Two doors from the Galloway entrance, Patsy turned sharply, uttered an exclamation and then began to run.

A carriage had paused before the door of the hotel, and the man with the photographs, valise in hand, was disappearing within it.

The carriage moved rapidly and straight into the busiest thoroughfares. It was growing dark, and moving vehicles and people began to lose their individuality. Soon there came a dead lock at a corner where trade and travel seemed to center, street-cars laden with homeward-bound working people, hacks, omnibuses, drays, private carriages, and a procession of beplumed and uniformed sons of Erin, returning from some out-of-town festival with blaze of band and martial tread, a little out of time, perhaps, owing to the day's fatigues, but fascinating still to Patsy, who watched their progress admiringly, standing still among the drays and street-cars.

When the lock was broken and street-cars and vehicles began to move, Patsy could no longer see the object of his pursuit. He ran hither and thither, throwing away his blacking-box in the recklessness of his search, until suddenly he saw the carriage turning out from the crowd and moving slowly close to the pavement.



With an exclamation of delight, the boy pushed and elbowed and dodged his way toward it, reached it at last, ran behind it to the end of the block, and then stopped suddenly.

The carriage had halted directly under the glare of a street lamp.

Patsy sprang upon the pavement, thrust his hands in his pockets, pulled his cap down over his eyes, walked boldly past the carriage and looked in.

It was empty. The man with the photographs had disappeared.

The boy started, stared, looked again, and then sprang back into the shadow.

"Confound him," he muttered, tears of rage and mortification rising to his eyes. That's twice he's done me in two days. An' me wide awake! Confound him!"

## CHAPTER XXI

### MURDER MOST FOUL

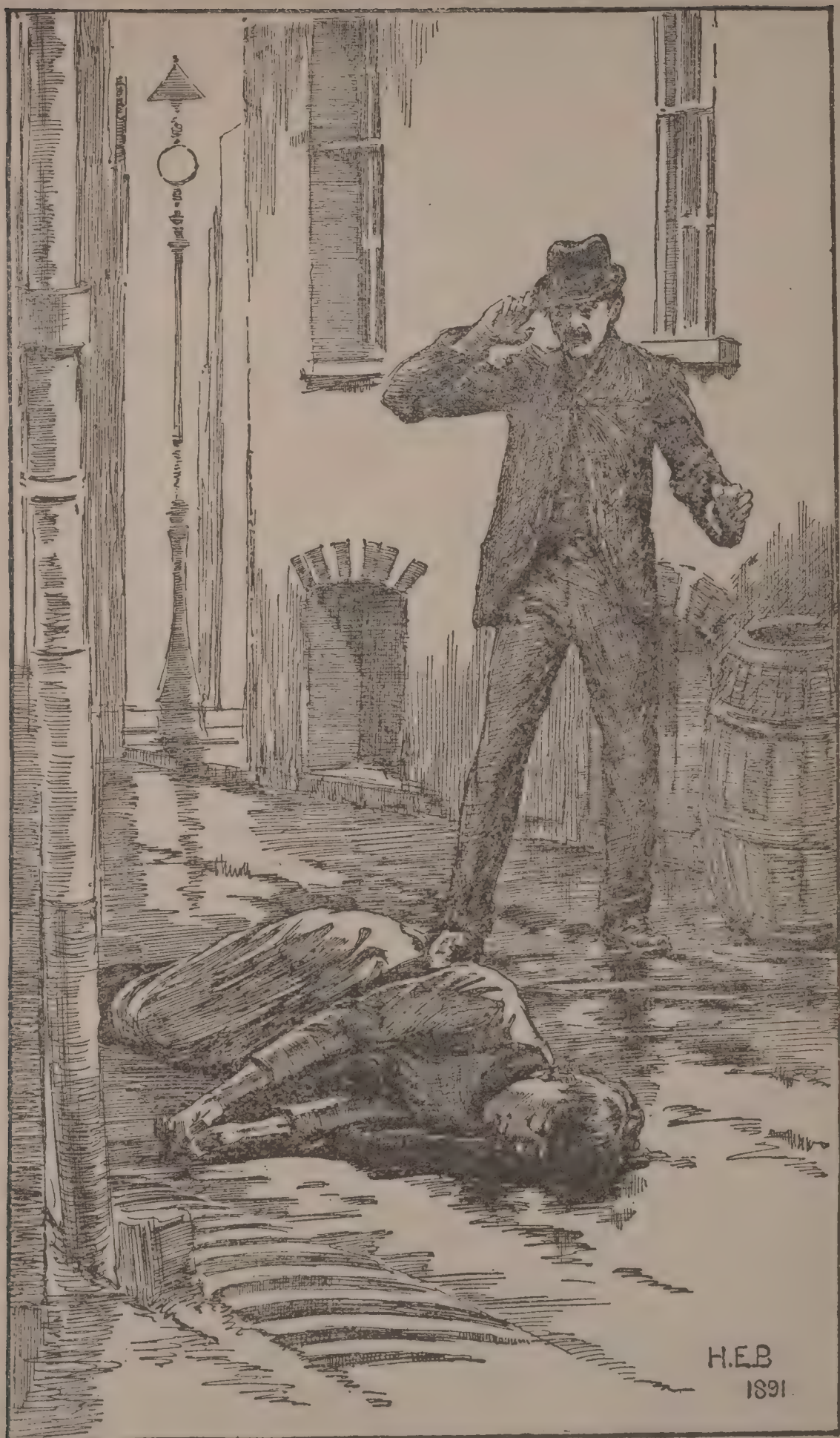
The following morning dawned gray and gloomy; nearly all night the rain had fallen, and now at seven o'clock it was falling still, slowly, steadily, as if it never meant to cease.

Down a certain street, near the heart of the city, a street given over, for the most part, to great warehouses, where foot travelers were few, and the rumble of drays and lumbering carts was oftenest heard, a man was walking slowly, a lean, pale-visaged, hungry-looking fellow, who had slept somewhere near among the sheltering bales and boxes—evidently a tramp, yet not quite the typical tramp of the city. His garments were sufficiently ragged, yet they were evidently made for him. His face, unshaven for many days, was sufficiently forlorn, yet it was neither coarse nor crime-hardened.

He was shivering with the chill of the morning and evidently hardly recovered from the effects of his last night's debauch. His face, a young face, naturally pale and bearing yet some lingering traces of refinement, was haggard now; his lips and the thin hands, which evidently were strangers to labor, were blue with cold.

Seeing him thus shivering in the chill of the morning, one might have pronounced him a pitiful figure; dejected, forlorn, despairing—but a desperate character he could not have been called.

Another waif of the streets who, evidently, had fallen from safety and comfort to the gutter—a wreck. Last



H.E.B  
1891

THE BODY OF A WOMAN, DEAD AND COLD.—Slender Clue, p. 189.





night he had spent his last dimes for drink, had slept in a cellar, and was now seeking a more populous and lively portion of the city as affording him a more hopeful prospect of a breakfast, or perhaps a dram at the expense of some more prosperous member of his own guild.

Something, lying a few feet from him in an alley which he was passing, attracted his attention; it looked, at first glance, like a leathern purse, and the tramp hastened toward it.

It was only a woman's glove that he found, lying half-folded as it had fallen, but as he stooped to take it up, something else farther down the alley caught his eye; something which made him start and look about him.

Another glance in the direction of the object of his surprise, and then he ran hastily to the mouth of the alley and looked up and down the street. This done he turned, and, noticing that he still held the glove, he unclosed his hand and it fell almost in its former place as he hurried down the alley.

It lay in a pitiful huddle close against the damp stone wall, its face turned inward, its hands clutching each other—the body of a woman, dead and cold.

The man started and shuddered, his first instinct that of flight; then he bent over the still form and a gleam of greed and hunger brightened his eyes. They had caught the glitter of gold, gold in her ears, upon her fingers, upon her breast.

His fingers worked rapidly now, even while he paled and shuddered, and in a moment he stood erect, in his hands a watch and pendant chain and one long ear-ring. Not its mate, that lay underneath, and he dared not turn nor lift the ghastly thing. Not the rings, they fitted close. He tried once, but the hand which he lifted seemed to menace him. Then another thought came—

the pocket. Again he bent down and stirred the silken drapery.

Something dark and soft slipped from its folds to his feet; a glove, the mate to the first, and then he saw that the pocket had been already rifled. It was empty, turned inside out, and the glove had doubtless been a part of its contents.

Then, besotted though he was, he knew, and shuddered again at the thought, that the other glove, the one he had held in his hand, had been dropped, or thrown away at the mouth of the alley, by the assassin.

Suddenly the place became horrible to him; he thought that the ringed hand stirred, and, thrusting his treasure into the breast of his ragged coat he bent his head and fled down the alley, fear lending him strength and speed.

That evening's "Owl" contained this wordy chronicle:

"MURDER IN OUR MIDST.

"Yesterday morning as Hans Reisen, a German teamster, was driving his wagon, laden with boxes for Feist & Weld, wholesale dealers in wines and liquors, into the alley which separates the warehouse of that firm from Ballard's Block, his horses became frightened, and getting down from his wagon to ascertain the cause, he found the body of a woman lying against the south wall. She was well—even richly—dressed, and apparently of middle age; the pocket of her dress was turned inside out, and there were other indications that she had been robbed of both money and jewelry, although several rings were yet upon her fingers and an ear-ring remained in her left ear. The body lay upon its left side with hands clinched and livid spots upon the neck, indicating strangulation. There were also bruises upon the head. The clothing was water-soaked and evidently it had lain



in the alley all night. The linen bore the initials L. W. and these were the only traces by which to identify. The woman was tall and large, with black eyes, high cheek-bones, a large mouth, and dark hair elaborately dressed and slightly streaked with gray.

"The body was carried to the nearest station and thence to the morgue.

"Up to this moment no clue to her identity, or trace of her murderer has been found."

This account was read by thousands and reappeared the same in substance, in all of the city papers.

It was not read by Rufus Carnes who might have identified the dead woman, and given suspicion a clue to follow; nor was it read by the chief of police, until the day had passed. But it was read by the clerk of the hotel which had sheltered Mrs. Lucretia Warham, and it led to a consultation between the clerk and proprietor, very private, very important and very interesting, as it progressed, ending in the departure of the clerk who took his way toward the morgue, while the landlord, exceedingly nervous and wearing a look of anxiety, filled the vacancy behind the register.

The account in the next morning's issue of the "Owl" filled three columns and was very interesting—and yet all that it said might have been condensed into much smaller space.

It began at the beginning, and gave a brief biographical account of "Honest Hans Riesen," who found himself in print for the first time, Hans being an orderly man who never resorted to beer, brawls and the police court to gain for himself brief notoriety, describing minutely the finding of the body, the body itself, its removal to the station and the morgue. It gave a "line drawing" of the scene; the alley and a portion of the buildings,

marking graphically the opening and the exit, the spot where the body lay, and the precise point in the alley where Hans Riesen's near horse first pricked up his ears. It expanded and repeated, reveling in all the hideous details, so necessary to the success of a highly moral family newspaper, so hurtful to the youth of a sensation-burdened city, so disagreeable to the average reader, so detrimental to the officer who, while seeking to unravel a mystery, finds his doings chronicled, misconstrued, guessed at, manufactured ready to his hand.

After a column of description came these paragraphs, headed—

"IDENTIFICATION.

"This morning at a quarter before eleven a young man well-dressed and with an anxious look upon his face elbowed his way through the crowd thronging to view the body, and at almost the first glance uttered an exclamation of horror. He was well nigh unnerved by the spectacle before him, but soon calmed himself and pushing his way through the eager crowd sought a private conference with the officers in charge.

"His statement was brief, but it threw some light upon the mystery.

"His name is Henry Waters and he is day clerk at the Avenue House, B— Avenue. He had recognized the body as that of one Mrs. Warham, who had been several days at the Avenue House, registering as a resident of some small town in the interior. Mrs. Warham left the hotel on Saturday evening taking with her no baggage, and had not since been seen. Her room had remained locked and her trunk and other luggage within it. But the proprietor of the house, as well as Mr. Waters, was beginning to feel considerable uneasiness when the description of the murdered unknown in the morning papers

awakened in their minds the fear that the unfortunate woman might prove to be their missing guest.

"The identification was beyond question. Mr. Waters even recognized the dress and mantle worn by the deceased. Later in the day the proprietor of the Avenue House and several of the servants viewed the body and knew it for that of the lady who called herself Mrs. Warham.

"Measures are being taken to discover the friends or relatives of the dead woman, and also to hunt down her destroyer; thus far, however, nothing has been learned concerning the former, and no clue has been found by which to trace the latter," etc., etc.

As on the day before, this long-drawn-out account of horrors, known and conjectured, was eagerly read by many.

In the private office of Rouke & Colton, a dignified gentleman, bald-headed and elderly, read it twice over. Beginning with scant interest, starting violently, and uttering an unintelligible sound as the reading progressed, starting up at last, agitated, nervous, but knowing fully what he must do, and doing it promptly though feeling vaguely that fate had treated him with undeserved disrespect, in bringing to him a client, a stockholder, to serve whom he, Elias Colton, who ran in a groove and lived the life of a dignified automaton, must visit—of all places on earth—*the morgue*.

But he did visit it; and as one result of his visit, a message to John Warham went speeding over the wires.

As a second result, the body of Lucretia Warham was withdrawn from the public gaze, properly encoffined and respectfully cared for; and, a little later, when the doctors had finished their examinations, and consulted, and disagreed, and given their final opinions, and the coroner's mysterious rite, resulting in nothing, was at an



end, all that remained of Lucretia Warham, escorted by a respectful and respectable clerk of the house of Rouke & Colton, was carried to her country home and there laid in the grave.

One day, during the week which was given over by the newspapers to wordy chronicles, all based upon the murder of Mrs. Warham, an announcement, of lesser interest, but still interesting, appeared in one or two of the morning papers.

These paragraphs chronicled the arrival at the Galloway House on a certain day, of Mr. Barney O'Calahan, or a person calling himself by that name, presuming himself, and presumed to be, the original O'Calahan of theatrical fame, Irish by descent, and by choice a citizen of San Francisco. This individual, so said the chronicles, had remained over night in the hotel, supping and breakfasting heartily, and seeming in the best of spirits. He had signified his intention to remain for some time in the city, but had sauntered out from the hotel office shortly after breakfast, and had not been seen since. The "valise" which remained in his room contained a half-worn suit of clothes, a change of linen, a "quantity of photographs," most of them "celebrities of the stage," some letters, "apparently penned by fair fingers," and very little else.

Persons knowing anything concerning this disappearance were invited to call upon the landlord of the Galloway.

To complete the history of Mr. O'Calahan, and set forth all that is known of his mysterious disappearance, it is only necessary to copy a paragraph from the "Owl," bearing date a week later.

"NOT THE MAN HE SEEMED.

"It is now pretty clearly established that the man,

calling himself Barney O'Calahan, the comedian, who registered at the Galloway House not long since and who disappeared next morning, leaving his baggage behind him, was *not* the genuine O'Calahan whose Hibernianism and eccentric acting, has won the admiration of theater-goers all over the land. He is believed to have been an impostor who for reasons best known to himself, indulged in a brief masquerade, at the expense of the Galloway House, which may perhaps, barely repay itself for the inroads made upon its larder by the healthy and hearty Mr. O'Calahan, should it succeed in disposing of his abandoned wardrobe, at a little more than first cost. No floater, no victim of thugs and sand-baggers, no suicide in any way answering the description of the whilom Barney, has been brought to light in this or any other city, so far as heard from, and the inference drawn by the police is, that the spurious "comique" has found for himself a new occupation, less amusing perhaps, but more secluded, and it is to be hoped more honorable and profitable."

Whether right or wrong the "Morning Owl" was left undisputed possession of its opinion, for Barney O'Calahan never came out from his "seclusion," and Rufus Carnes, when it came under his notice, was already so burdened with weightier matters, so beset with doubts and queries of a more important nature, that he could bestow upon it only a grin and a passing comment; and so ended the career and the history of Barney O'Calahan.

## CHAPTER XXII

### AT WARHAM PLACE

While Rufus Carnes is lying in his darkened room, carefully watched by doctor and nurse, and closely guarded from the distractions, the news, and noise of the outside world, let us follow Richard Stanhope, who, while as yet unconscious of the fact, has taken into his sinewy young hands the chain of fate which, beginning at the door of a prison, upon a spring morning, its strange growth is lengthening and adding to its links, until stretching from ocean to gulf, it encircles its victims and brings Rufus Carnes and Edward Percy Jermyn, late Nos. 43 and 46 of the state penitentiary, together once more; face to face, hand against hand, wit opposed to wit, in a bitter contest. But how should Richard Stanhope guess at all this, as he journeys toward an unknown village, upon an unknown mission?

And yet, even as he goes, he is lengthening the chain. He is not thinking of Fate or of the future as drawn by a steed, fleet, tireless and obedient, man's chiefest triumph over nature, he flits through the summer landscapes, northward. He is going to Upton. He knows that; and he is expected by one John Warham. Beyond this he does not think; he is full of youth and health and vigor; a prime cigar is between his lips; a late periodical, its pages half uncut, lies upon his knee. If you saw him as he rode through the early twilight, his eyes brightly gleaming, his mouth half-smiling, his fresh, frank face so youthful, so ingenuous, so careless, good-



humored, you might have fancied him a home-going student, not over studious; a mother's darling, and a young girl's hero; but never a man-hunter, keen, cool, clever, cultured by strange experience, wise beyond his years. For "Dick" Stanhope, good-looking, light-hearted, flippant Dick, had never known a home, a mother's love or a sweetheart's caress.

It was late afternoon when he arrived in Upton, a pretty pretentious little town that, because of its proximity to various small lakes and streams, assumed, in summer, fashionable airs, and called itself a "summer resort." The town was beginning to brighten in anticipation of coming guests, but our friend made his entry upon the scene of action almost unobserved, having first thrown aside his cigar as not quite in keeping with his habiliments, nor with the look of demure and youthful dignity with which, upon stepping from the coach to the platform of the station, he instantly clothed his face.

Mr. Colton had given him one useful hint, and this formed the foundation for his plan of action.

John Warham was a "school director," and, before the evening had fairly closed in, Richard Stanhope, armed with instructions by which to reach the houses of John Warham and four other "directors," set out on foot for "Warham's big house, three miles on the south road."

It was indeed a big house, awkward and showy, with its look of "newness" fresh upon it; and it was approached by a long lane, shut from the meadows on either hand by a wire fence, barbed and unsightly, which went straight up to the house that, standing upon a slight eminence, overlooked the road and many acres of the Warham possessions. Back from the big house stretched a dense grove, and on either hand a little in the rear, and at a respectful distance, stood barns, granaries and out-buildings many, all gleaming with new paint.

He found John Warham seated in the dining-room, shivering that May evening, beside a smoldering grate fire. A thin, dark, nervous old man, not yet recovered from the sickness which followed his daughter's strange disappearance; scarcely able to walk from his bedroom, which opened upon the room in which he sat, to his chair beside the hearth.

This man had counted the hours which must elapse before he might reasonably look for a living return from his message to Elias Colton, and he was quite prepared to anticipate the announcement of his visitor.

"Eh! a young man to see me? Of course! show him in, Susan—stupid!"

The last word uttered behind his hand, and followed by a dry cough, as Susan shut the dining-room door, and went to do his bidding.

"Good evening, eh! yes," he said as Stanhope bowed before him and extended toward him a card having the name of Elias Colton on one side, and a few penciled words upon the other. "Colton, eh! sit down young man, sit down! Susan, a chair here! now you may go, no—stop! have—have you had your supper, Mr. a Mr.—"

"Brown," said Stanhope gravely; "I took supper in Upton, Mr. Warham."

"Umph, Brown!" John Warham's words were always shot from his lips, his sentences jerky. "Then if you are quite ready to talk—"

"I am quite ready, sir."

"Susan," his tone increasing in sharpness, "you may go—go!"

Susan, a woman tall and grim, almost as grim as her master, shot one keen glance at the new-comer and went.

"Now Mr. Brown," began John Warham with brisk eagerness, "if you will just step to that door and see that she isn't outside with her eye or ear already at the key-

hole—that woman is my second cousin, and she's liable to take advantage of the fact—she isn't there, eh? now if you'll just step down that hall and shoot the bolt of the other door, it leads to the kitchen, we'll have her fast."

Smiling to himself, Stanhope secured the two doors and came back to the fire-place.

"On second thought," said his host, "won't you go and see that the front door is locked; some of them might fancy slipping in *that* way; they are very anxious about my affairs. They can't make anything by listening at these windows; they're too high up. There's no balconies and that kind of flummery about *this* room, thank goodness! umph!"

He stopped abruptly seeing that Stanhope was already half-way down the long hall.

When he had turned the key of the door leading out upon the lawn in front, the young detective came back and sat down opposite the old man, the smile of amusement yet upon his face. Thus for a moment they looked at each other, the smile upon the youthful face growing broader; the elder face becoming grim.

"So Colton has sent you!" Mr. Warham said sharply. "You're too young."

Stanhope laughed lightly.

"There are a few people in this world," he said, "who think I'm too old."

"Oh ho!" referring to the card which he held close to his eyes, "Colton seems to think you're old enough, boy— 'skillful detective,' *he* says."

"Does he," said Stanhope indifferently.

"Colton didn't know what I wanted," went on the old man half to himself. "I guess I ought to have told him."

"I fancied," said Stanhope, his face becoming grave,



"that your business with me was something concerning your lost daughter."

John Warham sprang up, and for a moment stood erect before his guest, then he fell back with a groan that embodied both mental and bodily anguish.

"What do you know about my daughter?" he demanded, while he yet writhed with the pain caused by his sudden effort. "Have you been—"

"I have not been indiscreet," said Stanhope quietly. "My business was with you; naturally I felt inclined to learn something about you before I left Upton."

"Yes, I suppose so! what did you learn?"

"Not much. Only that your daughter had disappeared; that various tales were afloat; that your wife and you had quarreled—"

"Oh, you did! That we had quarreled, my wife and I, you *did*! what else did you hear, eh?"

"Not much," again said Stanhope, rising and standing beside the high mantel, one shoulder resting against its edge.

'You're lying!' said the old man with a snap of his yellow teeth. "What did you hear about *me*? out with it! I ain't thin-skinned; what did you hear?"

"That you are rich."

"Umph! of course."

"Stingy."

"Oh, ho!"

"Hard to deal with. Hard to live with."

The old man drew himself erect in his chair and gazed at his visitor with growing interest.

"You're a cool fellow," he said; "I wonder if *you're* thin-skinned."

"On one point only," smiling and running a shapely palm over his close cropped head. "I don't like my youthful appearance commented on. It's my one weakness."

"You'll get over it. Do you think you are old enough to find my daughter? How long have you been a detective?"

"Twenty-two years and some odd weeks and days," replied Stanhope promptly. "Do you *want* me to find your daughter?"

The old man looked up quickly.

"You're a queer fellow!" he said. "Yes, I want you to find my daughter—if you can; I owe it to Colton to give you a chance. After all, Colton ought to know what you are worth. Yes, I want you to find Bertha." He sighed heavily. "I suppose I shall have to start you—you will want me to tell you the whole story; that's the worst of it! I'll tell you what I think, to begin—"

"Don't!" Stanhope dropped his elbow from the mantel and went back to his seat near the old man. "I prefer not to know what you think, unless it is a certain clue. Better no scent than an uncertain or false one. How old is your daughter?"

"Bertha was nearly nineteen."

"Only child?"

"No, my youngest. I have a married daughter, and one—besides Bertha—dead."

Stanhope eyed him keenly.

"You believe that harm has come to your daughter?" he said interrogatively.

"I think she's been murdered—I'm sure of it."

"Why?"

"Oh, for a hundred reasons. Bertha had no cause for running away;" he brushed his hand across his face and looked fixedly into the grate. Then his eyes came back to the face of the young detective, who seemed to be studying him intently. "Why do you look at me like that?" he said sharply; "what are you thinking?"

"I was thinking, sir, that you were hardly the man to understand a young girl, and her 'reasons.'"

"Oh indeed, and I suppose *you* are just the man."

Stanhope laughed.

"At any rate, I'm not so old that I can't imagine how young folks feel, sir. Was your daughter happy here?"

"Happy! Well, upon my word you *are* a remarkable fellow! Happy? why of course! I suppose so. Why shouldn't she be? she had everything she wanted."

"Did she. Mr. Warham, I heard down there," nodding his head in the direction of the village, "that her room remains just as she left it. That you—"

"It does. And I've got the key; do you want to see it? Upon my word I believe you *have* some sense."

"Thank you. Yes, I want to see this room. Who is in your house except this second cousin, Susan?"

"A girl, I forget her name, if I ever knew it. She came to help Susan the day my wife went away. Then there are two men, my hands."

"Eh?"

"*Farm* hands. What do you want of them?"

"Nothing at present. Can't we call up this Susan? I want her to show me the room and—"

"Why of course; go to that lower door, unlock it, and call 'Susan'. You may have to yell, she pretends to be hard of hearing sometimes."

Stanhope arose, took a step toward the door indicated, and then paused and turned toward the old man.

"Mr. Warham," he said in a tone that was strangely gentle, "you are trying to make a brave showing, and I like to see it, but you have been very sick; I heard that, too, in the village. You are weak and full of anxiety. Suspense is racking your nerves. Let me look over the premises to-night and let me talk with this Susan; she can tell me many things that will spare your feelings



and your strength. In the morning you and I will talk the matter over; you shall tell me your opinion, and, if I have formed one, I will tell you mine. Then, if we cannot agree, I will go back and Mr. Colton shall send you a better and an *older* man."

For a moment the old man's eyes met his, full of impatience and doubt, then his head drooped and he rested it upon his hand.

"Suit yourself," he said reluctantly. "I suppose you know what you will get from a woman like Susan? Garulous gossiping—"

"So much the better," said Stanhope briskly. "One thing though—this Susan is she—was she a—fond of your daughter?"

John Warham lifted his head, then dropped it again.

"Yes," he said huskily, "Susan was fond of Bertha—in her way." There was a break in his voice, he lifted his right hand and clutched at his throat as if the trouble were there; after a moment of silence he glanced up furtively. The young detective was unlocking the inner door and in another moment his voice rang down the hall.

"Susan—*Susan!*"

The old man fumbled in a pocket for a red silk handkerchief, with which he hurriedly wiped his eyes; then thrusting it back again, he drew himself once more erect in his chair and so awaited their coming.

"I may as well tell you," he said, when Susan had appeared and disappeared again in search of a lamp, "I may as well tell you that Susan disliked the present Mrs. Warham as much as she liked—my girl. I suppose," with something which he evidently intended for a facetious smile, spreading itself over his careworn, haggard face, "that you may as well get your items of family history out of Susan. Maybe—ahem, she can tell you bet-

ter than I could, anything you happen to want to know about my—about Mrs. Warham. But I want to have my say about Bertha—when the time comes. I shan't go to bed. I'm going to wait up and I'll be here when you come down. You'll stop here to-night. Susan, d'ye hear? The young man must have a room made comfortable."

"I hadn't thought of anchoring here," said Stanhope, looking toward Susan who was just entering; "but perhaps it will be as well. The key, Mr. Warham. Thank you. Now madam, or miss—"

"Miss," said Susan with a touch of asperity.

"Miss—Susan, will you lead the way?"

When they had reached the door of the rooms that had been Bertha Warham's, Stanhope took the lamp from the hand of the spinster and said quietly, with his eyes fixed upon her face:

"I shall want to talk with you, presently, when that old man has gone to bed. Can you sit up late, if necessary?"

The woman nodded.

"I don't hope to find much here, but I think he expects us to begin in this way. Hadn't you better sit with him until I come down?"

"I always sit with him," she said; "he ain't fit to be alone." She turned to go, looked back, hesitated, and came back. Stanhope looked up with his hand upon the lock.

"If you find anything," she said softly, "anything that will cheer him up a little, try—try to put the bright side out, till—till he gets better."

The detective nodded, and came a step nearer.

"You are afraid—" he began.

"I'm afraid of a good many things. If you're as sharp as you look, you will find out something in there."

"Oh!" said Stanhope. "Then *you* don't think I'm too young?"

"I guess you know your business," she said with a grim smile. "Them eyes wasn't put into your head for nothing."

"Thank you. I hope you will continue to think so. Why do you think I will find something in here?"

"Because," nodding significantly, "I know Bertha Warham. If I could 'a' got into that room—"

A sudden sound below caused her to start.

"There, he's thrown down his hickory cane. He allus pretends that he dropped it, but I know what it means. He thinks I've been up here long enough. I'll sit up for you—till daylight if necessary."

She struck a match against the wall beside her and hurried downstairs by its light, and before her feet had touched the lower step, she heard a door close above and knew that the young detective was face to face with whatever of mystery there might have been locked within Bertha Warham's deserted rooms.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### WITHIN THE MAZE

The young detective opened the door of the room, which was to give him a clue to the personality of the missing girl, in a mood extremely passive.

But his first impression upon stepping across the threshold was one of surprise; his lips gave vent to a sound that was half-whistle, half-exclamation; then he turned sharply, removed the key from the lock, and closed the door, relocking it again upon the inside.

Just a moment ago, while he stood outside her door, Bertha Warham was to him an unknown quantity; unknown, and—uninteresting. Now, he could almost see the girl who had inhabited that room. It was full of her, she seemed to mock him from behind its dusky, half-revealed adornments.

He put down the lamp with quick animation, and thrust a thumb and finger into his waist coat pocket; reaching up with the unoccupied hand to draw downward a beautiful swinging lamp, which hung from the center of the ceiling just above a table that was unique indeed.

"Light," he muttered, "more light," accompanying his words with brisk movements, and pushing the lighted lamp upward. It threw a bright glow about the room and showed him a glimpse of an alcove behind a pair of crimson curtains on the side of the room nearest the door by which he had entered.

What a strange room to find in that house! How differ-

ent from all that was outside! from all about it! Was Bertha Warham as different from the old man downstairs; from the woman Susan, the people of Upton, as was this room from those below with their stiffness, their ugly angles, and inharmonious fittings? Near the small table stood a chair, broad, low, softly cushioned, covered with some rich gleaming fabric, all strewn with strange Japanese figures, and daintily aswing upon springs and frame of bronze.

Stanhope turned the wick of the glowing lamp still higher and sitting down in the cushioned chair began a slow survey of the room.

Everything about him was vivid, striking, full of character: and even Stanhope, unversed as he was in the higher branches of art criticism, could feel that much upon which he gazed was bizarre and strangely out of place in the boudoir of a young lady—for a boudoir this room was evidently intended to be.

"She had everything she wanted," mused Stanhope aloud, his voice sounding oddly to himself in the stillness about him. "She certainly had everything she wanted in the line of furniture and 'fixens,' and again he let his gaze wander about him. "If she had not stopped, her indulgent papa would have been compelled to enlarge this room if not the house. It would be difficult to crowd in another passenger here."

The room was indeed filled; half a dozen easy-chairs of various sizes and varying patterns, each unique in its way, oddly carved, quaintly upholstered, peculiar for its shape or texture and no two alike; tables and brackets, and shelves that were fantastically decorative; oddities in bronze, brass, carved wood, and ebony; pictures upon brackets and easels; a weird death-scene in a darkened room; a driving storm from which a woman with a haggard face and despairing eyes looked out

through night and darkness; the portraits of two famous athletes, handsome fellows, both perfect specimens of animal beauty; opposite these a group of lovely heads; children with angelic eyes, soft fair curling hair, and dainty curves and coloring; upon an easel in a remote corner was a richly mounted engraving, a pack of hounds in full cry, leaping ditches, tearing through hedges—a picture to delight the eye of a sportsman; and upon the floor beside it a companion piece, a pair of noble horses awaiting their riders, and beside them a lady, tall and stately, distributing her favors equally between them.

"Queer pictures for a woman's fancy," mused Stanhope, rising and crossing the room to inspect them more closely, and then he noted that among all the scenes depicted there, paintings, drawings, photographs, the latter abundant and exhibiting a varied taste in their selection, this pictured woman beside the horses was the only pictured woman to be seen. He turned over the photographs, and made a tour of the room, examining brackets and tables and their odd and pretty adornments.

"Queer again," he soliloquized, pausing before a handsome miniature cabinet. "Not a photograph album nor a book of autographs in the entire collection. Strange girl!"

Next to come under his eye was a quaint little writing-desk, broad and low with gilded carvings and painted panels; two small brass lamps turning easily in their brackets were attached to the wall on either side; Stanhope turned them outward and lighted both.

"Still more light," he muttered. "I begin to think that this subject will require all the light we can muster; now for the alcove."

It was large enough to be called a room, in that house, and indeed was so called by those who believed "a door



to be a door " whether it swung on its hinges, or hung suspended from a brazen rod.

Behind the flowing curtains Stanhope found a floor of wooden mosaic, half-hidden under rugs of all hues and sizes, a lace-draped brass bedstead, a dressing-case of ebony, and accessories of black, white and vivid rose color.

In each room was a tiled grate, but while that in the outer room stood open with ashes strewn upon the hearth, the one within the alcove was tightly shut, the fire-board in its place and a small Japanese screen set before it.

Stanhope, trained to take note of small things, noted this, and once more he found time to comment, and to think:

"Everything in this room means something." He seated himself in a rose-covered dressing-chair, and looked up and down. "It's as full of character as--" he bent suddenly forward, attracted by a bit of pale blue and gilt, that showed itself from under the screen, and with a quick movement, propelled the dressing-chair toward the object. It proved to be a book-mark, long and narrow, and with the initials of its owner embroidered upon it in gold thread. As he pulled it toward him, he met with more resistance than might have been expected from a thing so frail. He abandoned the chair, and drew away the screen. The ribbon was held fast by the painted fire-board. He pulled sharply, and the board seemed to give way, and then he noticed that it was very clumsily secured; wedged, on one side with a bit of card-board, and upon the other with a fragment of what might have been an ivory paper-knife.

"It looks like a woman's work," he muttered, and

then he drew a finger across that portion of the hearth that had been between the fire-board and screen.

"Not much dust," making the second experiment, and critically examining his finger, and the trail it had left upon the polished metal. "A two weeks' accumulation, perhaps, not more. Ah-h!" He turned swiftly, pushed back the chair, and stretched out his hand toward the screen. At that moment, something else caught his eye, something that had been at first concealed by the drape of the dressing-chair, and which, while he stood upon the hearth, after drawing forward the chair, was directly behind him. It was a heap of cast-off clothing, thrown carelessly down, as if by a hasty hand, and this disorder was concealed by the low dressing-chair. Stanhope looked down at them for a moment, and then returned to the fire-place. He had learned more in Upton than he had told John Warham, and his ideas of missing Bertha were not so vague as might have been supposed. He had found it easy—it is always found easy—to set people gossiping about a sensation, "be it mystery, murder, scandal or what not." He had even ventured a few questions, without arousing suspicion, for suspicion, like a half-blind horse, can only watch one side of the road. "The Bertha Warham mystery" was now nearly two weeks old, and since the first day, the good people of Upton, who were not so burdened by their own affairs as to be unable to give a little attention to those of their neighbors, had kept a sharp lookout for a possibly coming detective, than whom to the dwellers in a remote country town, no individual, be he priest or statesman, king or kaiser, is more interesting, fascinating, mysterious; and, it might be added—aside of course, in lowest whispers, lest it destroy the delusion of the "remote" ones—more generally disappointing.

The Uptonites had kept an eye upon the railway

stations, and all new-comers in Upton underwent, when they were good-natured enough to permit it, a rigid scrutiny and mysteriously worded cross-examination at the hands of the knowing ones, these invaluable accessories to a country town, who are chiefly conspicuous about groceries, saloons and street corners, and who aid in rendering the main street attractive by attitudinizing on the tops of dry-goods boxes, empty casks and barrels, otherwise past their usefulness.

Stanhope knew how to make the village oracles yield up their wisdom, and his tardy coming was his safeguard against suspicion. Besides, had not the Uptonites collectively and individually already fastened the mark of identification upon no less than six individuals: two wholesale drummers, a patent medicine man, a roving parson, out of a pulpit, a sewing-machine agent and a female book-canvasser.

Of these six "possible detectives," each had a respectable number of believers—a large following of the unsanctified believed the parson "too fat for a parson;" and the Upton milliner, with her two assistants, agreed, for once, with the dressmaker over the way, that the book agent was a "good deal more than she tried to make out," while another faction had reasons for believing the machine agent worthy of their suspicions, for what depth of shrewdness and reasoning might not be expected from such a combination of red hair and foxy eyes as the bold knight of the "best-running-machine-in-the-world ma'am," possessed beyond dispute.

While the eyes of all Upton were thus occupied, Stanhope had entered unnoticed and taken possession of the field; and, from the ready tongues of the willing talkers, he had gathered a few notions of Bertha Warham, quite different from any he might have gained from her father, Susan, or any other prejudiced person, whether friend or enemy.



When Stanhope pushed back the chair, leaving it almost in its former position, and turned again to the grate, it was with the air of a man who had grasped at something tangible, and ceased groping; and, in less time than we have taken to tell of his movements, the impromptu wedges were lying upon the floor, and the detective upon his knees before the hearth, was removing the fire-board, and peering behind it.

"Umph!" he said, beginning to work rapidly and with observant eyes. "It's packed—newspapers," removing a handful, "crowded in hit-or-miss. City papers, illustrated—humph."

They were packed indeed, firmly enough, but in a manner betokening haste; rolled together, twisted, crowded in corners and crannies; when they were removed, a crimson cloth that had evidently served as a table-cover, was disclosed, and this concealed a collection of books, and two or three boxes, one of these tightly locked and without a key.

Evidently this was not what Stanhope had expected, or hoped to find, and he glowered upon the heaped-up books in their rich bindings; then he began to remove them mechanically, opening each and holding it aloft by one of its covers while he fluttered the leaves in search of any fragment of writing that might fall therefrom.

It was a motley collection for a young lady's boudoir—historical romances, strong rather than savory; French novels, not so strong, and decidedly unsavory; poems—Byron, Swinburne, Keats, Goethe, Moore, Burns; essays, biographies. Two or three scrap-books, queer collections of weird poetry, sententious quotations, and descriptive clippings, of plans, people, phenomena; odd, mysterious, gorgeous, wicked fragments of word-painting.

One book, among the lot to come under his hand, yielded

to him, as a reward for his close search, a long pink envelope bearing the name of Bertha Warham in a slim, regular hand, and a date more than a year old. It contained a letter, a thin pink sheet closely written in the same slim hand that had superscribed the envelope; having assured himself of this much, Stanhope turned and placing the letter upon the chair behind him, went on with his search.

Only one more fragment could he coax from the fluttering leaves of Bertha Warham's favorite books, and this was a fragment only, the torn half of a letter written in pencil and apparently thrown aside and never finished—a letter written by Bertha Warham to some person unnamed.

Assured that nothing more was to be found in this hiding place and wondering a little at the oddity of the concealment, the detective turned his attention to the little satin-wood box, which he lifted, shook, held to his ear, and then rested upon his knee, while he reached in his pocket for a bunch of tiny keys—some of them mere shadows of steel and brass wire.

After many trials the lock yielded, and as the lid of the box fell back Stanhope exclaimed triumphantly:

"I thought so!—her diary," and then as he took out the crimson-covered gilt-clasped volume and it opened in his hand, his exclamation of triumph changed to one of chagrin.

More than half the leaves of the book were gone; only a few written pages remained, and these the first in the book.

"By Jove!—she's a queer one," muttered the young inquirer, "just enough to tantalize one, but we shall see. One would think the young woman had anticipated my visit. Oh no, Miss Bertha Warham, *you* were not abducted! not *you*!"

He pushed the pile of books from him, and taking in his hands the pink envelope, the fragment of letter and the disemboweled diary, he went to the outer room; as he paused a second time before the low writing-desk some one knocked softly upon the door. He tossed the book and letters upon the desk and hastened to open it.

The woman Susan stood without, a small lamp in her hand, her face full of anxious inquiry.

"He is growing very nervous," she said, "and impatient to know what you are doing. Have—have you found anything?"

Stanhope smiled and glanced back toward the desk; then he moved back and drew the door farther open.

"Come in," he said in an undertone.

She entered the room quickly and herself closed the door.

"I'm so glad," she began hurriedly; "I wanted a chance to tell you—you must not contradict him."

"About what?"

"About Bertha. He thinks—he's sure she has been unfairly dealt with. If you find reason to think otherwise and tell him so he—" She hesitated.

"He will give me my discharge, eh?"

"I'm afraid so. I wish you'd humor him."

"Look here," said Stanhope stepping aside so that the light would fall full upon her face, "do *you* think Bertha Warham has been unfairly dealt with?"

"No," she said slowly; "I don't."

"Umph! Have you formed an opinion?"

"No."

He turned and lowered the lamp, turning down the light to a mere glow.

Come," he said, taking the key from the lock and motioning her to precede him. "Let us go down. I'll hear the old man's opinion first, and form mine later—



after I've heard yours. We will sit up an hour or two after he is in bed and out of the way. I want to ask you a few questions."

"If you'll only quiet *him*, and set his mind at rest, I'll sit up all night if it's necessary," she said.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### FIRST CLUES

It was a long wandering story that Richard Stanhope was obliged to hear, from the lips of John Warham.

The old man seemed to have made up his mind in the interval of Stanhope's absence, to help the young man by telling the whole story, from his point of view; and John Warham was not the man to imagine that there might be a point of view other than his.

After an hour of talk all on one side, statistical, narrative, reminiscent, he summed up his case with this sentence:

"Now you see for yourself how ridiculous all this gossip is. Bertha never left her home of her own free will. She did what she liked with her own money, and with mine. *I* never crossed her and I never heard her complain. She was the brightest creature—always, and as sensible! well, I can't unravel it—I expect *you* to do that. But mind what I tell you, I don't pretend to say who did it, nor how it was done, but my girl has met with foul play. She ain't the one to be abducted and kept a prisoner—I know that—if you ever find her—you'll find her dead."

When he left the old man, Stanhope returned to Bertha's rooms to await the coming of Susan, who tarried below to assure herself that the invalid was comfortably in bed, and then to attend to sundry domestic details, overlooked earlier in the evening, owing to the state of mental excitement into which, in spite of her stolid exterior,

the good creature had been plunged at sight of the young detective.

Meanwhile Stanhope, seated at the dainty writing-desk, had turned the brazen side-lamps inward and was slowly and with as little sound as possible assuring himself that the desk was locked, drawer and panel.

He had no intention of pursuing his investigation under Susan's sharp eye, and so he turned from the desk, walked the length of the two rooms and back again and then went and stood in the open doorway. There was no light in the hall above or below, but muffled sounds from kitchenward assured him that Susan was there, intent upon some housewifely after-thought, and he closed the door softly and going back to the desk took up the long pink envelope.

He gave to the dainty superscription a second half-admiring scrutiny and then slowly drew forth the letter, watchful lest any bit, a scrap of paper, a rose leaf, a fragment of some dainty fabric such as women are fond of sending each other, when they can in no other way create a ripple of envy at the thought of a dainty garment possessed and worn by another, should escape him. Then with an air of growing interest he unfolded the sheet, pink-tinted like its envelope, and exhaling a subtle perfume.

As his eye traveled slowly down the page, an observer, had there been one, might have noted a change in his face, a quick kindling of the eye, an alertness that seemed to grow and spread itself from the mobile features to his very finger-tips; and as he turned the page, he made one of those forward movements, a sort of involuntary adjustment of the entire body, a settling and disposing movement, followed by instant self-forgetfulness and absorption in the work before him.

When he had finished the letter he straightened himself,



looked about him, the alert expression still upon his face, and then returned the letter to its envelope, and put it, together with the fragment of paper he had found, into the pocket of his loose coat. Then, for full ten minutes, he sat with his fingers drumming a brisk tattoo upon the desk, and his eyes turned expectantly, almost impatiently toward the door.

At the sound of a closing door he arose quickly and peered out into the hall. A light seemed moving toward the foot of the staircase, and then came flickering upward, and in a moment the candle and Susan's face appeared half-way up the stairs, and Stanhope drew back and held the door wide open.

Susan came slowly into the room and he noted the anxious look upon her face, and that she carried the candle in her left hand while the right was hidden in a capacious pocket.

She started and winced as her eyes suddenly encountered the brightness that the three lamps shed about the room, and then turned back and put her candle down outside, after which she re-entered, shut the door, and stood leaning against it.

"Sit down," said the detective nodding toward one of the luxurious chairs and himself returning to the seat by the desk.

"No," she said in a kind of breathless trepidation, "I can't—I never *could* sit in this room," glancing involuntarily at her simple calico gown; then suddenly, withdrawing her hand from her pocket, she held toward him a cabinet photograph. "Here's her picture—the last she had taken."

He took the picture and scanned it curiously. It was a companion to the one then in the hands of Carnes and the chief of police. After a brief scrutiny he laid it upon the desk beside him, and standing before the woman,

as respectfully as if she were the mistress and not the maid, he looked at her for a moment with frank, half-smiling eyes.

"Does your cousin," he asked, "still think that I am too young for this sort of work?"

Susan's lips were firmly shut while she emitted from her nostrils a very emphatic and decisive sniff, then the lips unclosed.

"This trouble's been too much for him. He's lost all his common sense," she said sharply. "I've seen Mr. Colton here, three—five times; he's got my money and I know it's in good hands; *he* wouldn't have sent you here if he hadn't known your ability."

Stanhope laughed and then indulged himself in one of his characteristic but very unprofessional bits of frankness.

"Between you and me," he said, "Colton of Colton & Rouke never had personal dealings with a detective; somebody has told him that I know my business, and he's taken their word for it. Colton wouldn't know anything more about detective ability than he does about a trotting horse, and Colton's a Baptist deacon, Miss Susan. Now *I* know a good many bad detectives, and *one* good one. I'm as good as the average—the bad ones, and the good one, well if I get into deep water I can call *him* in."

"What's his name."

"His name?" Stanhope was amused by her abruptness, and felt inclined to humor it. "His name is Carnes and he's the best fellow in the world."

"Humph!" ejaculated Susan and then stood looking at him as if half-inclined to dispute the point.

"I want to ask you a few questions to-night," said Stanhope, looking at his watch and making himself more comfortable by leaning against the corner of the writing-

desk, where he could look down upon the pictured-face of Bertha Warham as he talked, "Not many, because it's late, and too much talk is confusing."

"I should think so," again the sniff; Stanhope began to think it her one cherished mode of strong expression, and indeed he was not far wrong. "Like *his*," nodding toward the floor.

"Exactly. I let *him* talk for his own benefit, now I want you to talk—for *mine*."

"Well I'm ready."

"I see you are a woman of few words; I begin to think you are one to make your words count." Susan's mouth relaxed a little of its grimness. "Her father tells me that you were fond of—this girl," he tapped the photograph lightly.

"I was,"—she hesitated as if rejecting the word, then for want of a better seemed to recall it, "fond of her."

"Yes; now tell me what sort of a girl was she—did she seem—to you?"

"What sort?"

"Yes; what was her character, was she—for instance—good-tempered?"

"Yes, she was good-tempered—she was always good to me—and him."

"Her father, you mean?"

"Yes."

"And her step-mother—did they always agree?"

"Not at first—they agreed to let each other alone—after a while."

"I see. How did she occupy herself?"

"How? she didn't occupy herself, she just read and rode, when she wasn't gone somewhere or didn't have company? or else she curled herself up in one of these chairs and looked into the fire or out of the windows dreamy and idle; sometimes she wrote letters."



"Was she ambitious, do you think?"

Susan knitted her brows and gazed at him as if in doubt, then she said slowly:

"Yes, I think she was, in a way. Bertha could coax and wheedle, but she liked to rule too; she used to come to the kitchen and to my room when we were in the old house; she didn't do it so much after this one was built and she got these rooms fixed up. Yes, Bertha had high notions about things; she wanted elegant things, and to associate with polite people."

"Do you think that she ever cared for this fellow—Larsen?"

"Why, when Bertha was fifteen she liked anybody and anything that could amuse her. And she could twist Joe around her little finger—if he had been as cranky with her as he is with everybody else, she wouldn't have snapped her finger at him. Any other fellow that would fetch and carry for her would have pleased her just as well. I believe she thought more of her horse, 'Wild-bird,' than she did of all the men she ever saw first and last."

"Now there's a point, and it's an important one. Did this girl indulge in any romantic fancies? was there any one, do you think, for whom she might have cared more than she did for this Larsen—or—the man she was about to marry?"

"She didn't care for *him*," said Susan quickly, "any more than she cared for Joe Larsen; but she meant to marry him at first—I am sure of it. As for anyone else, why—" her face suddenly darkened, then flushed, and she moved a step nearer, "see here, young man, if you are getting any ideas into your head about that girl—if you think she ran away with anyone—with—with a *lover*, you're all wrong. *That* wasn't in her—never! she was ambitious, and felt above us all; her ways were

not like ours, and no wonder, she came honestly by all her queerness; she was like her mother before her, only firmer, more decided, and more venturesome. But let me tell you *this*—if Bertha Warham is alive to-day, she ain't no man's victim; and she ain't—bad."

"Thank you," said Stanhope. "I admire your spirit, and your faith in the young lady. Tell me something about her mother."

"Bertha's mother was city-bred and a perfect lady, delicate and refined; not over strong; and fond of reading romances and poetry; she was a living day-dreamer. I don't see how she ever came to marry John Warham, though he was a good looking man in them days, too; she used to like to talk about her air-castles sometimes, poor thing! but *she* was weak where Bertha was strong. Bertha inherited her mother's traits, but she had too much health and strength to be satisfied with dreaming."

Stanhope stood silent, his eyes resting upon the photograph near him. Her words seemed to have suggested some new thought. Finally he lifted his eyes and moved away from the desk.

"You say she was good-tempered," he said slowly. "Now I am going to suppose a case: If some one had injured her—really been unjust or cruel or both, might she not have found in such an injury reason or excuse for leaving her home?"

"You're thinking of Mrs. Warham," said Susan, almost smiling. "But it wasn't her; Bertha never'd a' left home on *her* account. That would please Mrs. John too much. No—Bertha wouldn't be very quick to forgive an insult, nor slow to fight for her rights; she was cheerful and most always good-natured, as any lively, healthy girl is apt to be, but she had *grit*."

"About this Larsen now. Do you know what her feelings were during the last few months?"

Susan reflected.

"I think," she said slowly, "that she had a kind of horror of him, toward the last. He didn't take it very meek when she mitted him."

"Oh! Where is he at this present time?"

"I don't know. He took it awful hard when she was missin'; he hung around here most of the time for pretty near a week. Then all at once he was gone. Mrs. Warham said he was gone to try and find Bertha."

There was a tinge of skepticism in her tone, as if Mrs. Warham's opinions were not hers.

Stanhope lifted his arm, drew down the hanging lamp, and turned it low.

"It's almost one o'clock," he said. "I won't detain you longer. Oh! by the way—do you know a person by the name of Hildreth? Rose Hildreth?"

For the first time Susan's face betrayed surprise.

"Rose Hildreth! well I declare!" then checking herself with sudden severity. "Yes, Rose Hildreth was a school-mate of Bertha's. They were great friends."

"Were?"

"Yes. They wrote each other letters every other day, I guess. And Rose came down here and visited Bertha. That was a year and a half ago. Something happened that broke off the correspondence—I haven't heard Bertha mention her for many a day."

"Do you know where Miss Hildreth lives?"

"Yes, she did live in St. Paul; her mother kept a large boarding-house."

"Thank you, Miss Susan; I won't keep you longer; where am I to sleep?"

"In the room just beyond this. The door is open; there's water and a lamp there. Do you want anything?"

He answered in the negative, and they went out together, Stanhope closing and locking the door.



He found his room cosy and inviting. Susan had lighted a fire in a small grate, and there was luncheon upon a little table, such as good country housewives know how to prepare, and active young men with good digestives, know how to enjoy, especially if the hour is one o'clock in the morning.

There is nothing especially thrilling in the spectacle of a good-looking detective eating pumpkin pie, but the "thrilling situations" in real life are seldom comfortable ones, although they help us to appreciate the comfort of quiet moments—and of pumpkin pie. Stanhope was quite content, sitting before the cheery blaze; he smoked a cigar, with hardly a thought of his surroundings, but by and by the alert look came back to his face, and he drew the pink envelope from his pocket, and once more took out the letter.

The first page was essentially feminine—and unimportant. It told of dresses and beaux, and made brief mention of a new comic opera, and a new comic star—feminine. Stanhope's eye passed rapidly over this page and a part of the next, but he lingered over the following sentences:

"I'm sure if I had known when I sent you that newspaper-cutting that it would have set you off into such a tirade, I'd *never* have sent it. Of course I'm awfully sorry for poor Fanny and all that. Think of her throwing herself away like that and then throwing herself into the river! I suppose he *was* an awfully handsome fellow though. Well it's good for him that he didn't have a spirit like *yours* to deal with. *There!* if mamma saw that, she would make me tear up this letter; and that brings me back to the place where I started from. You know—no you don't, but I am telling you as fast as I can—that mamma sometimes reads your letters

—that is, sometimes I show them to her. And she thinks some of them very interesting, and bright, and witty; she says your ideas are startlingly original. But, you know, we have got into a very frank and free way of discussing things, and *some* of your letters I don't quite like to show to mamma. Now this last letter, and what you said about poor Fanny, shocked her a little; she said it was too *pronounced* for a girl. I don't believe you know how you *did* go on; you must have been at white heat—of course *I* quite agree with all you said, only I never should have *said* it—and I'm convinced too that more than half, the most sensible, practical half of womankind, think just as *we* do; but it isn't quite the talk for "sweet girl graduates" to indulge in. You know I keep all your letters, dear, as of course you do mine; such friends as we are! So when you write don't say things too "awfully awful," and don't write back and crush me by saying that *you* never write *slang*.

"How is that poor ugly Joe of yours? and *is* he yours? Or have you succeeded in shelving him? and does he stay quietly on the shelf where you put him? Do you know I have fancied he wouldn't—

"Oh-h! Mamma rushes in; she has got word that we will have company to dinner—a Mr. Myers—old school-day acquaintance of papa's, widower and immensely rich. Good-looking too for such an old man. I saw him last week at the theater. Dear me? I don't see what he is coming *here* for."

Here the detective paused, uttered a short laugh, and giving the remainder of the letter the same rapid glance that he had bestowed upon its beginning, he returned it to its envelope.

"I think," he said half-aloud as he arose and put back a half-burned stick with the toe of his boot, "I think that I must call upon Miss Rose Hildreth."

He put away the letter and took up the lamp.

"If I can open that desk," he said to himself, "I may find more of these letters, and I need them."

He went back to Bertha's room, closed and locked the door, relighted the lamps on either side of the desk, and began his work.

First he tried the skeleton keys, and he found that one drawer yielded to their persuasion, but it contained nothing that could be of use to him; in fact it was almost empty.

He pulled it entirely out, and thrusting his arm into the opening thus made, felt carefully of the lining at the back, tapping it lightly with his thumb and forefinger; then he arose and pulled the desk away from the wall.



## CHAPTER XXV

### A BUNDLE OF LETTERS

From his pocket, he next produced another ring, larger than that which held the keys. To this was attached several steel implements, small but strong, and of varying shapes. With one of these he rapidly removed the screw that held the thin boards attached to the back of the desk. It fell apart, and Stanhope removed the sections, noting, while he did so, something white at the bottom of the open space.

It was a letter without its envelope—a long letter written in a labored hand, blotted, misspelled, and signed, "Joe Larsen."

It was a wild and rambling document, filled with upbraidings and beseechings, alternated. It recounted his own acts of devotion, and charged her with falsehood, treachery, and deceit. It implored, and it threatened. It besought her to break off her approaching marriage, and fly with him; and ended with a horrible oath of vengeance, if she persisted in her intentions. "Much as I have loved you," it said, "if I cannot prevent your marrying, otherwise, I will kill you, and end everything. I mean it, Bertha. Choose quickly. You shall never trifle with me again. *Alive or dead, you are mine.*"

"A clue," murmured Stanhope, as he put away the letter. "We must find Mr. Joe Larsen, and see what manner of man he may be."

The next morning saw Richard Stanhope leaving

Upton, as quietly as he had entered it. He had mastered the situation, so far at least, as John Warham and Susan were concerned; already these two silent people, endowed with a taciturnity that would have been skepticism in persons more worldly wise, were beginning to discern in him a masterly spirit, and, without half-reckognizing it, to indulge in vague hopes—they hardly knew of what.

"I want you to leave this business entirely to me," Stanhope had said, standing before John Warham, having just announced his intention; "I begin to see my way, I think; but it may be a long road. You must let me work in my own way."

At this point the old man had nodded impatiently; "When I have anything to say I will say it; until then, the less we talk—"

"Yes, yes!" the old man broke in, "the less talk the better!"

"Then we understand each other. I shall go away to-day, and should I not come back by to-morrow night, let us say, you may know that I have found a clue and am following it. I think that I shall come back, however."

It was late in the afternoon when the young detective, well and fashionably clad, and looking every inch a gentleman, paused before a house in a quiet street, that bore upon its front the unmistakable signs of the shabby-genteel boarding-house, and hesitated a moment before ascending the steps and ringing the bell.

He had already pulled at half a dozen bells, attached to as many doors, that had been indicated to him by the city directory, as the portals that gave shelter to various Hildreths; and each of the six had in turn denied all knowledge of a maiden named Rose. He was now almost at the end of his list, and somehow, he found himself unable to fancy that this house could

possibly be the abiding place of the author of the pink letter, which he carried in his pocket. But, while his doubts increased, the door opened, and a slatternly servant stood before him looking an inquiry.

Stanhope's doubt was not apparent in his face or manner. He favored the girl with a half-smile, that brought an answering grin to her countenance, and asked with the air of an old acquaintance:

"Is Mrs. Hildreth at home?"

The grin faded from the girl's face.

"I guess ye couldn't see her," she said slowly.

"Why!"

"She's—sick. She don't see nobody."

"Oh—indeed! Then perhaps I can see some other member of the family, Mr. Hildreth or—"

"Why!" the girl fell back a pace. "There ain't no Mr. Hildreth! He's dead—long ago. Do you want a room?"

Her movement gave him an advantage; before he answered, he was across the threshold.

"You had better show me into the parlor, or somewhere," he said, with an air of authority—"and call someone, the housekeeper—or—" He paused, as the girl made a sudden movement, and his eyes followed hers.

"What is it, Jane?"

A tall woman with a dark thin face stood at the top of the stairs—looking down upon them, and slightly frowning.

"A gentleman wishes to see Mrs. Hildreth," replied Jane. And then, while the woman came slowly down the stair, she made a gesture, by which she seemed to wash her hands of him, and retreated kitchenward.

When she had reached the foot of the stairs, the woman glanced backward over her shoulder, and then came quite close to Stanhope before she spoke.



"Do you want to see Mrs. Hildreth."

"Yes, madam—I—"

"Wait," she said, her tone low as if fearing to be overheard, "are you an acquaintance—a boarder?"

"No, Madam, I have a little business that—"

"Come this way," again interrupted the woman, her dark face growing darker; and she led the way to a gloomy little back parlor where she drew up a curtain, pushed open a shutter, and then turned to look at her visitor.

He stood calmly before her while she surveyed him from head to foot.

"Then you are a stranger to Mrs. Hildreth?" she said finally.

"I am a stranger and my business is—rather important."

"Mrs. Hildreth is ill, she does not see visitors;" she was still eying him closely. "May I ask the nature of your business?"

"It concerns a Miss Rose Hildreth."

Over the woman's face surged a wave of angry crimson. "Young man," she exclaimed sharply, "that is a name that is not spoken in this house! Did that girl send you here?"

It was Stanhope's turn to stare, and he did it to some purpose; the look of quiet unconcern left his face and the resolute glance with which he met hers caused her to start.

"Let us understand each other," he said quietly; "are you a member of Mrs. Hildreth's family?"

"I am her sister."

"Oh, then you are the very person. You have a niece named Rose Hildreth."

"Do you know her?"

"I do not. You *have* such a niece?"

"I wish to heaven I could say no!" she shut her teeth with an angry snap. "The little viper!"

"I don't understand your allusions to your niece. I infer that she is not here."

"No, she is not here."

"Will you tell me where I can find her?"

"No! I thought you did not know Rose."

"I never even heard of her until yesterday."

"Humph! and what did you hear yesterday?" her tone was growing aggressive.

Stanhope's face grew stern as he replied, borrowing her her own tone:

"I heard that she might be called upon as an important witness in what may prove a criminal case. Madam, I am an officer with full authority to investigate this case. You will do well not to put obstacles in my way. I think you had better explain your remarks and tell me where to find your niece."

The woman sat down in the vacant chair, quite calm and serious, all traces of anger gone.

"I am willing to tell you anything that I can," she said, "if you really *are* an officer and not—" she paused and looked fixedly at him—"what I at first thought you."

"What was that?"

"Never mind," stirring uneasily, "if you are what you say."

"Perhaps I had better convince you on that point." He drew from a breast-pocket a folded paper and put it in her hand.

It was a letter of authority signed by the city's chief of police, and after reading it carefully she handed it back with a stiffly respectful air.

"I don't know what you want of Rose," she began. "I hope it isn't to bring more disgrace upon us—public disgrace."

"What I want is very simple," said Stanhope. "A year and a half or two years ago, she had a school friend with whom she corresponded for months. I want those letters."

"Oh! why I dare say they are in—" she broke off abruptly and bent her eyes to the floor.

"In this house? is that what you were about to say?"

He was still standing and she motioned him to a seat near her.

"Sit down," she said; "I may as well tell you about Rose. Any boarder or servant in the house would, if I did not."

"Quite true."

"Well, to get the worst over, first:—Rose Hildreth ran away from her mother's house nearly a year ago—disgraced."

"Oh!" Stanhope uttered the ejaculation in spite of himself. Could it be that Bertha Warham—he checked the thought and said simply:

"Go on, madam."

"There is not much to tell. It's a common story enough. My sister is a little weak woman, ready to be duped by anybody. Her husband died seven years ago, and left her nothing but a small life insurance; it wasn't enough to support them and educate Rose. The girl was pretty, and frivolous to the very ends of her fingers; she wanted to be dressed like the daughter of a banker, and she generally was. Martha would go shabby herself, and scrimp the boarders, to give her finery; she thought Rose was born to marry well—was too good for common mortals. The girl has lived here among a house full of young fellows and flirting married women, and been spoiled by them all. She took to flattery like a duck to water; she was so good-natured that they all liked her; she was always laughing and singing and playing the piano. I



have lived here since my brother-in-law died, but two years ago I went away and was gone more than a year. When I came back I could see a change in the girl, but my sister never saw it, and it was useless for me to try and open her eyes; we had not agreed very well about her from the first, and Martha always felt that I disliked Rose."

"Did you?"

She had been looking out of the window while she talked, but now she suddenly brought her eyes back to his face.

Something in his look caused her to feel that it was not worth while to parry or dissimulate.

"Rose was too much like her father," she said coldly, "and I never liked him."

"Oh," the young detective might have been a young lawyer instead. "So you saw the girl going wrong and did not speak."

His witness now looked him full in the face; a gleam of resentment in her eyes.

"If you are as smart a young man as you appear to think yourself, you must know that one can see a thousand things that seem to them proofs, but which they cannot present as proof to others."

"That's true!" said Stanhope smiling a little and easily ignoring her.

"Well, that was my position—toward the last I *did* remonstrate with Martha; but she was blind to the very end. She was candid and honest herself, and she thought that Rose's happy go-lucky good humor was honesty. It wasn't in her any more than it was in her father before her. But there it is. Martha thought Tom Meredith was a model man."

Stanhope sitting opposite her in a shabby arm-chair had dropped his chin upon his hand. He was studying

the woman before him, as he always, sooner or later, studied his witnesses.

"I should think," he said speculatively, "that a man who died leaving behind him that impression, could not have been a desperate character."

"Umph! he did not leave that impression generally."

"No! he does not seem to have done so—in your case." Then he arose and once more stood looking down at her. His questions had been abrupt, some of his comments almost brutal. But they had their meaning and their effect.

"You say that this girl ran away; did she take her belongings with her?"

"No indeed."

"Are they still in your—in her mother's possession."

"Yes," she answered after a moment's hesitation.

"Well, as I said in the beginning, I want some letters that were in her possession, and, I presume, are still among her effects, as I have in her own hand-writing her assurance that she preserved the letters."

"What letters?"

"The letters written her by one Miss Bertha Warham."

"Oh!" he was quick to note the sharpness of her startled ejaculation and the look upon her face.

"So you know Miss Warham?" he said quietly.

"I—no."

"You know of her? You have heard her name before?"

"Yes," she said absently, and again turned her eyes to the window; she was evidently pondering her next words.

"Well I should like to know anything that you can tell me about Bertha Warham, but first and most important, those letters; I am willing to beg, buy or burglarize them."

The eyes came back from the window; she seemed to

have made up her mind. "What has happened to Bertha Warham?" she asked. "You said something about a criminal trial."

"It may end in that. Bertha Warham has disappeared. It is my business to find her."

"Disappeared?"

"Yes, vanished utterly, leaving no trace behind her."

She looked at him fixedly for a moment and then surprised him by saying as if to herself:

"I'm sorry! I liked that girl."

"Oh!" said he, "I thought you didn't know her!"

She laughed a short hard laugh; he could see that she was growing more at ease, and more confident.

"What good would those letters do you?" she asked, ignoring his comment.

"Oh, come, we are getting on famously; you have those letters, or you know where they are. What good will they do me? That is my affair. The good it will do you to give them up is this: If we have the letters we may be saved the necessity for dragging this niece of yours, to say nothing of her mother and yourself, as associate witnesses, into court, to tell what you know about Bertha Warham; be it much or little."

"I will tell you what I know about Bertha Warham now. My sister has been utterly crushed since Rose turned out so badly. I thought she would get over it in time, but she don't seem to. She is an affectionate soul, and Rose was lavish with her petting, and she had a way of seeming to be confidential when really she was *not*, showing her letters, talking freely about her beaux and quoting their sayings. She always knew what to tell and what not to tell, well—I see you are getting impatient—when Rose ran away, her mother could not bear to go near her room, and of course we could not afford to shut it up, so I quietly went to work, changed everything in



it and distributed the things that Rose had called hers about the house, where her mother would not be apt to see them often. The bureau was an old-fashioned thing, and to improve the room for a new gentleman who had engaged it I put my dressing-case, which was new, in its place, and took the old bureau into my room. It was crowded full of things, and I packed the clothes in a trunk and had them taken to the garret, but one drawer was filled with knick-knacks and trumpery and I left that as it was for some time. One day I began looking things over, and among the rest there was a decorated paper box packed with letters; there were other letters, mind you, and I began reading them, thinking that it might be a good thing to show a few of the choicest to Martha; it might open her eyes and help to cure her of her fixed notions that Rose had been a poor victim instead of a hardened little sinner. Well, I began at the box and found that these were all from the same girl—*such* letters! I read them all. Those in the box were very friendly letters, but among those loose in the drawer I found one which broke off the correspondence. That girl, hundreds of miles away, had guessed the truth about Rose from the letters she wrote, and cut her acquaintance."

"And yet," said Stanhope, "there are people in Upton who think that Miss Warham ran away with a lover."

"I don't believe it! I tell you that girl's entirely different from Rose. Perhaps she ran away, that would not surprise me, but the girl who wrote those letters never would be deceived by any man. She might burn a town if she took it into her head, or go to war in men's clothes, or kill somebody, but she's never taken Rose Hildreth's track, *never*."

"Well," said Stanhope as if no more remained to be said, "you are the second woman who has said that

sort of thing about her since yesterday, which increases my interest in those letters. You will let me have them of course? You shall not be the loser by it."

"Yes," she said after a momentary hesitation, "I don't see why I shouldn't—as it's for a good purpose."

"It's for a very good purpose," he said. "It's to help solve a riddle, and set a poor old man's heart at rest."

After opening Bertha Warham's letters, Stanhope decided to make his work as complete as possible by visiting Rose Hildreth.

She had not tried to conceal her abiding place from those who might desire to seek her out; and her aunt, having become his ally, told him where the misguided girl might be found, and added:

"Don't tell her that I gave you the letters. Don't mention us if you can help it."

It was too late to see Rose that night, and he wished to be on his return journey at noon. So at ten o'clock in the morning he climbed the two flights of stairs which led to the "furnished room," in a big dark store-building, which Rose Hildreth called her home.

There was the sound of some sudden movement following his knock, and then the door opened a little way and a blonde and befrizzled head appeared in the aperture.

There was a little start and a big stare from two round china-blue eyes, an instantaneous glance downward at a toilette somewhat disarranged and untidy, followed by a little toss of the head, and then the door opened wider and she stood before him half-defiant, half-coquettish, wholly challenging his admiration.

That moment revealed her character to the young detective. Shallow, vain, a pronounced coquette, thirsting for admiration. One of those kittenish, purring women who come into the world with their animal natures fully developed, and their souls dwarfed and dor-

mant. What such a girl, woman shall become rests, not with herself, but with her surroundings; hedged about by luxury, sheltered from storm winds, protected from contamination, propped by stronger natures, she may become, as years roll on, a harmless and colorlessly correct member of society, a virtuous and vulgar gossip, a patient griselda; left to herself, face to face with the world and its problems—ah; the kitten! She frolics and gambols in the sunshine, and is pleased with the empty rustle of the withered leaves that flutter to her feet; she is fair, and soft, and alluring; but a kitten's day is fleeting; and then—ah, the felines, old and lean and battle scarred, that haunt the leads and make night hideous. That which is true of the first feline stage is true of the last. God pity the kitten! God save us from the cat upon the leads!

"You are Miss Hildreth?" asked Stanhope touching his hat and politely ignoring her smile. For this strong young fellow who had seen the world in some of its worst phases, and who had a ready sympathy for the erring unfortunate, loathed the vicious, and despised the weak, with an ardor which time would yet soften and develop into charity.

"Well I don't call myself that *now*," she said with a matter-of-fact candor. "I call myself Rose Foster."

"Oh! Then I suppose Mr. Reynolds was present at your christening?"

"I don't know Mr. Reynolds. Is he—a friend of yours?" She had moved back a pace and suffered the door to swing open, and he stepped within, laughing the while and closed it before he answered.

She made no comment upon this but remained standing near him with her hands lightly clasped, and the alluring half-smile that is an instinct with such women, upon her face. Inwardly she was thinking him a hand-



some fellow, and wondering what had brought him to her door.

Stanhope's laugh was for her blunder, and his words convinced her of it.

"I see that you do not know Mr. Reynolds and his 'great works.' No he is *not* a friend of mine, thank heaven!"

She drew back a step, and the remnant of refinement left in her sent a flush to her already pink cheek, and rendered her soft little voice somewhat sulky.

"You are a very cool person. I don't think you had better make me a very long call."

"I quite agree with you, Miss—Foster. Pray, don't resent the Reynolds business. Your friend, Bertha Warham, would have known all about him. Does she know that you have changed your name?"

"I don't know anything about Bertha Warham." The kitten was growing sullen, and seemed strangely devoid of feminine curiosity.

"Oh yes, you do, you know a great deal about her. Do you know where she is now?"

"I should like to know who sent you here to ask me such silly questions." She gave her head a little side-wise movement, and walked over to the window.

"Well, I don't mind telling you;" he advanced to the center of the room and laid a hand upon the lapel of his coat. "It was the chief of police who sent me." As he spoke he turned back the lapel, thus displaying an officer's badge.

There is something in the mere name of the police instinctively terrifying to the ignorant evil-doer, and Rose had not yet learned to laugh at the police.

She turned pale and assumed a more respectful attitude.

"What have I done?" she stammered. "What do you want?"

"I'll tell you. I want you to answer a few questions, and not ask any. If you do that—the chief of police will not trouble you again. But mind this: if you give me any untruthful answers, I shall *know it*. "I know what I am talking about; my object is to find out what *you* know."

She sank down upon the window seat, all her jauntiness gone.

"Oh!" she said, "I know now: you are going to try to mix me up in *that business!* but I tell you I don't know *anything* about Bertha Warham. We are not friends. I saw in the "Herald" that she had run away though—or *something* of that sort."

"Oh, well you've made a beginning, go on. Or first tell me just how much you saw in the papers?"

"I only saw one paper. I hardly ever look at the newspapers, and this, that I saw, was only a paragraph—that she was missing—disappeared or something of that sort."

"And it did not interest you?"

"No, Bertha and I were off a year ago."

"What caused you to fall out?"

"Well I wrote her something that she didn't approve of. She has done lots of things that *I* wouldn't *dare* do, and never winked. But she couldn't see other people's actions in the same light, I guess. She broke off the correspondence."

"And you have never heard from her since?"

"No, indeed!"

"When did you see her last?"

"Oh, more than a year ago, almost two. I invited her here at Upton."

"You were very intimate then. Did she have any friends, whose acquaintance she might have made away from home; any admirers who wrote her letters, perhaps?"

Here the girl laughed a little.

"No, indeed. Why when we were at school we were both *as* green, but Bertha was always smarter than I. Admirers! Bless me! I don't believe she ever looked at a man, except that ugly Joe Larsen. Once when we were at school a young fellow, a clerk in a drug-store, *and* real nice-looking, was struck with her. Madam Brown used to let us go to the postoffice twice a week, and the drug-store was just next door; we had to pass it when we didn't go round the longest way, you know; sometimes we went around."

"I don't doubt it."

"Well, this young man sent Bertha a note—a regular love-letter. Bertha just laughed at it, and then in a few days she got another, and the fellow was always out at the door when we came along. He knew what days and hours we went by, you know. When Bertha got the third letter she was awfully angry and she never opened it, but the next time we went to the office she put all three of the letters in her pocket, and when we passed the drug store there he was as usual; well, quick as a flash she whips out those letters, and threw them square in his face. He looked as if he could hide between the leaves of a newspaper, so flat you know—none of us, there were seven or eight girls, knew what Bert—we called her Bert at school—was going to do. But everybody that saw it laughed or hooted at the poor fellow, and we all, all but Bert, waved our hands in mockery to him, and went into the postoffice in a blaze of glory."

She had quite forgotten her fright, for the moment, and told her little story with a relish. Stanhope was wise enough to believe that her mere opinion concerning the movements of such a girl, as he believed Bertha Warham to be or to have been, would be of little



value, and he had no wish to prolong the interview.

He let her finish her story and then asked:

"Have you any of Miss Warham's pictures?"

"No. I had two photographs, but when I got her last letter I flew into a rage and tore them up. It was an awfully mean letter."

"I dare say you thought so." He had read that letter quite recently and spoke with more meaning than she knew.

"Yes. Well my fits don't last long, I wish I had kept them now; the big one, framed, would be lovely on that bracket."

Stanhope shrugged his shoulders; he was losing his interest. "I suppose you destroyed the letters too," he said carelessly, his words accompanied by that movement and tone that indicates the ending of a dialogue.

"No. I had vented my spite on the pictures, and besides—well, to tell the truth, I never thought of it; I'm careless I guess. I wish now I *had* burned the letters and kept the pictures. But I have not got them," her tone growing strenuous as if she feared that he would cast doubt upon this statement. "I left them—they are with some other things of mine, in another place."

"It's of no consequence, Miss—Foster; good morning."

"Well!" ejaculated the girl when he had closed the door behind him. "That's a cool fellow. My, but he was good-looking though; and just *too* saucy for anything!"

Then she added in a lower tone and with a little resentful gleam in her round eyes:

"May be after all Miss Bert Warham isn't any higher up in the world than Rose Hildreth." And then with a rueful sigh and the corners of her mouth drooping, she added, "Nor any lower down than Rose Foster."

Half an hour later she was singing an air from *Girofle Girofla*.

At noon, sitting opposite a mustached young man, at a table especially arranged for two in a little restaurant not far from the dark stone block, she said to her *vis a vis*:

"Harry, who is Mr. Reynolds?"

"Keeps a summer garden out at Bath," answered Harry promptly.

"Oh, pshaw! you *know* I don't mean *him*. Isn't there a poet or author or something named Reynolds?"

"Well, I should say so. He's a novelist. What put you onto him, Rose?"

"Oh, nothing."

That afternoon saw Stanhope steaming toward Upton, and as often as his thoughts reverted to Bertha Warham or Rose Hildreth he said, to himself, "I wish I could see Rufe Carnes."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A FLASH OF LIGHTNING

It was late in the evening when Stanhope arrived at the Warham farm-house, and this time he was much better dressed and a better looking young man than had first appeared to Mr. Warham and Susan.

It was Saturday evening, and as is usually the case in such villages as Upton, the strength of the masculine element was "down town," and in the village stores, the barber shop, the grog shops, wisdom was to be had for the asking.

Stanhope had matured his plans, so far at least as they concerned Upton, and the work that he might do there, and he now went boldly about among the villagers, talking freely, and manifesting considerable interest in the Bertha Warham mystery.

"I have spent a couple of hours in the village," he said to John Warham, when their first greeting was over, and they had talked for a few moments in that desultory way people sometimes use when they are each preoccupied, and neither quite ready or willing to approach the subject of interest.

"I thought it as well to make a beginning there, for I want to get a few points that I am more likely to glean from careless gossip than by direct asking."

"How do you figure that?" asked the old man.

"Well, when you approach a person in the character of an interviewer you put him on the witness stand, as it were. He's on his guard, and apt to give wrong im-



pressions. He's too self-conscious, you see. If he's feeling big, and likes to hear himself talk, he may say too much. If he has a prejudice, and lacks principle, he'll color his statements. There's a class of information that one can always get from public gossip, the more unofficial and inconsequent the better; and you'll get more of it."

"Yes. May be so." The old man spoke absently, wearily. He seemed to have no interest in the subject.

Stanhope noted the languor, and the more than usual pallor of his face; then he looked at his watch.

"It's late," he said, "and I'm a bit fagged."

The old man brightened a little.

"Oh," he said. "You're old enough to own to being tired, ain't you?"

"Yes," assented Stanhope, "I'm old enough for that. But to-morrow will be Sunday; we can talk all day if we can find enough to talk about. I can't do much else."

"Yes, that's so, we can talk to-morrow; good night, young man."

But they did not talk on the morrow.

An hour later, in spite of his plea of fatigue, Stanhope was smoking a cigar upon the front piazza, when Susan came out to him.

"I've put a lunch in your room, again," she said; "you seemed to like the other."

"It was more than seeming, Susan." He took his feet down from the piazza-railing, and the cigar from between his lips. "It was genuine liking. You see I call you Susan; you have another name, probably, but I don't know it."

"My other name's Harkins," she said in her straightforward way, "but Susan's good enough for me. I—I'm afraid he's got a turn for the worse."

"Mr. Warham? Oh, I hope not, although he certainly did look badly to-night. Has he a good doctor?"

"Oh yes, he's good enough. But it ain't that. It's this uncertainty that's killing him. He'd stand any sort of downright bad news that wasn't doubtful. It's the suspense and the sort of—baffled feeling. It's in his nature to go against it," she paused a moment and looked out over the fields opposite, brown in the faint moonlight, then, "I wish I knew what you think—what you mean to do," she said half-wistfully.

He tossed his cigar over the railing and arose and stood close beside her. He felt a genuine liking for this plain, practical, limited woman—so sparing of her speech, so kindly, and so strong within her limitation.

"I can't tell you precisely what I think," he said. "But I am willing to give you some idea of what I shall try to do. I am not afraid that you can't keep a secret."

"I should hope not." There was no movement of the head, no touch of righteous self-assertion, such as many another woman would have indulged in, in her way of uttering these words. They were matter-of-fact, conscientious, seriously spoken.

"Oh, I'm sure that I'm safe with *you*." He laughed softly. "I only wish there were more women like you. Now, to begin fairly, I'm going to tell you where I have been. Or say! can you guess?"

She lifted her head and looked at him, and in that dim light he could see a smile upon her face, but she only said:

"Rose Hildreth?"

"Yes. I went to see Rose Hildreth. I found a letter from her in Bertha's desk and that sent me off."

Susan nodded intelligently.

"Well, we won't go into particulars; I found her home a boarding house of the sort they call fashionable, the

Lord only knows why; I found a female as crusty as brown bread and as sour as you please, and I'll just relieve my feelings to you—I don't often find a confidante—and say that I detested the woman at first sight, a long thin sharp-faced old maid or widow."

"Seems as if you was trying to describe *me*," broke in Susan dryly.

"You?" She could see that he was scrutinizing her through the gloom, and she felt that his look was quizzical and half-mischievous. "*You* Susan? well perhaps it does—a little; but there's a vast difference, let me tell you; why *that* woman never looked anyone square in the face and talked straight to the point, as you do, and she would see me in the last stages of starvation before she would serve me with doughnuts and pumpkin pie at midnight without hope of reward. She's the only good reason I could see why Rose Hildreth should run away from home."

"Run away!"

"Yes, Rose ran away." He briefly told of his encounter with Rose's aunt and of his subsequent meeting with Rose herself. When he paused at the end of his story she said:

"Well—I shouldn't a thought it of Rose Hildreth! Such a pretty little thing."

"That's the mischief of it," said Stanhope sagely. "I'd rather be deformed and hideous than a pretty woman without brains. She's just the one to go to destruction headlong through the first gap in the hedge, and it need not be a very big gap either."

"Oh!" ejaculated Susan. "But she's so young! She might be saved."

"Not she! she's as old as she ever will be; she's stopped growing, brains and all! Why bless you, Susan—there's nothing there worth saving."



"Well," said Susan, fetching a long breath, "I never'd a thought *you* was like that."

"Like what?"

"So sort of hard. It sounds like Bertha when she used to get to going on about—such girls."

"Yes. I believe she did hold such opinions—judging from her letters—at any rate she thought she did. But, Susan, as for my hardness let me tell you that I have had ample chance to learn it," there was more pathos in his voice than he knew; "I grew up in a large school, and poverty and want, hunger and necessity were my teachers. I was one small and ignorant boy, fighting for my life with the whole world. Friends were not born to me; I had to make them, such as I have. I couldn't well lead the life I have without learning something about human nature, Susan."

"Well," said Susan, "may be it was best for you in the end, and I guess you ain't made very bad use of what you've learned. I guess you ain't that kind."

Stanhope dismissed the subject with a gesture.

"I did not intend to talk about myself," he said. "I was about to tell you what I was going to do; well it isn't much. I'm going to stay in this neighborhood for a while and be as sociable as I can, gradually; and here you may be able to help; I want it to leak out that I am trying to investigate this affair. Understand, I don't want to figure as a *bona fide* detective, that would be too much for them, but I want it to become known that I am a young law student with plenty of leisure, and not too much brains, and that I have taken it into my head to play detective. I have offered my services to Mr. Warham, without money and without price understand, and Mr. Warham has humored my whim and consented to harbor me. How the good folks receive this information will depend, of course, upon how I play my part.

I shall be confidential, mysterious and not too clever. You must see, Susan, that if I can't pick up a clue here there is no use in looking further away. This is the place for me at present. Do you think that fellow Larsen will be likely to come back here?"

"Mercy! I don't know! Joe Larsen always *was* too much for me."

"You don't like him?"

"Umph! No."

"Well, Susan, after to-morrow if any one is too curious about me you had better mention, in confidence of course, that I'm a young lawyer with a taste for detective work; and you might add, by way of putting them at ease about me, that you don't think I'll set the river on fire."

"I ain't much given to lying," said Susan dryly, "but I'll try and make 'em easy."

Stanhope laughed lightly and turned toward the door.

"Well, I'm going to try that luncheon now," he said. "Good-night, Susan."

In the morning John Warham was unable to leave his bed; the doctor came and looked at his tongue and felt his pulse, told him that he had eaten something which had caused a slight fever and that he would be "all right" in a few days.

Afterward, in the privacy of the kitchen he told Susan that the old man was threatened with a relapse and that she must look after him carefully.

All that day Stanhope wandered about idly, listlessly, half-bored at first, then, as the day wore on, he found his way into the woods, with quiet enjoyment of what was, to him, a novel experience, a day alone with nature in her most beautiful guise.

It was a fair summer day, bright and balmy, and he enjoyed the woody perfumes; sounded and measured,

and admired some of the huge trees that were John Warham's pride in the bit of virgin forest which he called his "natural timber;" there were thickets of hazel and haw, ferns and mosses, flowers with the dew still upon them, and lately-come, nest-building birds many and blithe. He bounded across half a dozen little brooks, and drank at a cold clear spring. Sometimes he came upon sleepy cattle browsing in the young grass, or lying under the hazel brush; and afar off he heard the pleasant monotonous sound of the Upton church bells.

He found himself hurrying back to the farm house, and arriving late at Susan's "two-o'clock Sunday dinner," after having more than half-lost himself in the woods. And after dinner he hastened back to their quiet shade.

With evening came a light rain, and after a plentiful luncheon—Susan called it a "cold bite," and explained that it was their substitute for "supper," on Sunday nights—he went to his room to smoke a cigar by the open window and to think about the morrow.

He had conversed a little with John Warham before luncheon, or rather he had talked and the sick old man had listened and he had told him his plan very much as he had told it to Susan.

It pleased the old man. He pronounced it practical and sensible, and promised to play his part.

Stanhope had smoked one cigar and lighted another when drowsiness overtook him and he nodded, and then fell asleep in his chair.

Suddenly a loud crash awoke him, a peal of thunder, short and sharp, the presage of a sudden downfall of rain. At the moment when he opened his eyes a vivid flash illuminated the landscape without, and Stanhope, with his face turned toward the window, saw a man coming toward the house from the direction of the woods.



He was awake instantly, and his first thought was "How long have I slept." Then somehow, the possible lateness of the hour seemed to connect itself with this man, who was approaching. That he was not coming from the direction of the highway, and that he appeared a person who ignored the weather and moved with a fixed purpose, he had recognized in that one awakening glance.

He drew out his watch, now fully awakened and holding it before him leaned outward so that his eyes with one look might note the time and the scene without, and then he awaited the next flash; it came soon, and showed him the hour, nearly midnight. It showed him also the figure of the man, approaching as before steadily, straight toward the house, like one who knew his ground.

For half an hour the rain fell in drenching showers; again and again the thunder roared and rumbled, and the lightning played fitfully, and every lurid gleam showed him the figure of the man walking up and down upon that portion of the lawn that lay just below the windows of Bertha Warham's deserted rooms.

In one of the intervals of darkness, Stanhope had softly closed his shutters, and from behind them, through the half-turned slats, he watched the movements of the man below.

He could see that with every flash of light the head was lifted, the face turned toward Bertha's closed and shuttered windows; but that face was shaded, almost concealed by the dark felt hat that was drawn down over it. Occasionally the arms moved with strange nervous gestures, and he could even see the convulsive workings of the lifted hands, while the feet kept up an incessant promenade to and fro, to and fro, beneath the sheltering trees.

When the half-hour had nearly expired and the thunder began to muffle itself and sound from afar, a noise from below-stairs caused the detective to start up with a new thought.

He opened his door softly, went out into the dark hall and leaned over the stair rail. Yes, there was a light below. Susan was stirring; perhaps the storm had awakened the master of the house; or, if not asleep, made him more restless.

With a swift noiseless step, sure and easy from frequent practice, he descended the stairs and approached the dining-room door which stood open.

"Susan!"

It was the merest whisper, but her ear was quick; she heard and came on tiptoe to the door.

He placed his finger upon his lip and signaled for her to follow.

At the foot of the stairs he turned, and, as she approached, placed a hand upon her sleeve.

"Come upstairs," he whispered. "No light. There is a man out on the lawn; you can see him from my windows. I don't think much of his actions. Come up and see if you know him."

He placed a hand upon the railing and hurried up the stairs, and Susan in the same manner and with just as light a foot followed him.

She hesitated for a moment at the door, and then guided by a flash of light, crossed the room and stood beside him at the window, her face close to the blinds.

The storm was almost over; the shower was now a soft sprinkle; the lightning played at longer intervals and in less blinding flashes.

They waited some moments for another illumination, and when it came, both saw him distinctly. He stood facing the window of Bertha Warham's *boudoir*, his face

and his arms upraised; when the next flash came, he lay prone upon the earth face downward.

Susan caught her breath and drew back from the window

"It's Joe Larsen," she said. "We must go down." And then as they softly went down the stairs, she whispered:

"Do you think he's struck?"

"I think not, Susan; but look here—if that is Joe Larsen, we must get him in and keep him here until I can make his acquaintance; you must manage your part. Can you? You know what to say about me."

"I'll do *my* best," said Susan grimly, the while she was softly unlocking the front door.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### HUNTER AND HUNTED

Susan Harkins was a woman of nerve, and leaving Stanhope to follow around the house and across the wet lawn as best he could, she made her way straight to the dark figure upon the ground and bent over it.

"Joe! Joe Larsen."

He started slightly, half-lifted his head, then let it fall again; the movement was full of a dogged desperation, and Stanhope, who was near enough to see it by the help of a feeble flash of lightning, started slightly and then pressed forward, feeling, without knowing why, a growing excitement within him.

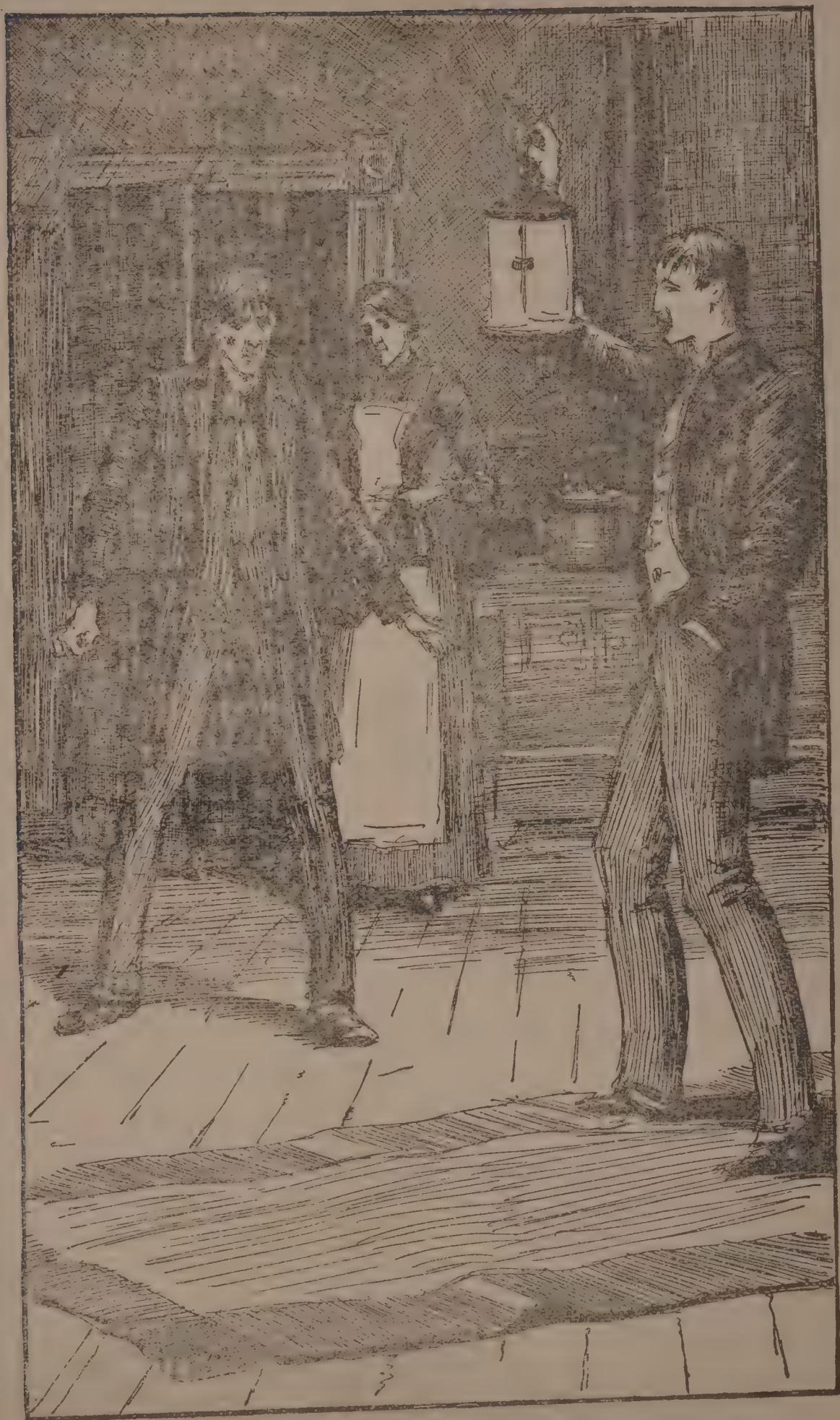
But Susan put out a hand and gave him a warning touch.

"Go into the house," she said in a tone of natural authority, "and fetch out a lantern. There's one on the kitchen table."

Perhaps Susan had anticipated the effects of these words. Again the prostrate head was lifted, and, at the same moment, in obedience to another and more forcible touch, Stanhope moved toward the house, wondering a little at himself.

Joe Larsen lifted himself upon his elbows and then to a sitting posture.

"Get up, can't you?" said Susan, laying hold of his coat-sleeve. "My, how wet! What on earth is the matter, Joe? was ye *struck*?"



STANHOPE RAISED THE LANTERN ALOFT.—Slender Clue, p. 255.





He shuddered, and got upon his feet, slowly, and with apparent effort.

"Yes," he said hoarsely. "I—I guess I must have been - stunned."

Her hand, firm, and with a strong detaining grasp, was still upon his arm, and she knew that he was trembling throughout his entire frame.

"Come into the house," she said in a milder tone. "You'll be the death of yourself yet, Joe Larsen! But I'm glad you've come. He ain't so well, and I guess he kind of wants to see you."

"Who—old Warham?"

"Yes, why don't you come along? you act as if you'd done something you was ashamed of. Do you want me to catch *my* death too, out here?"

She felt him start, and seem to gather himself together, as they moved toward the house; at that moment a gleam of light appeared at the corner.

"You can go back with that lantern," called Susan fretfully. "There ain't no need of our *all* bein' drowned! were comin' in."

Stanhope went back to the kitchen, a grin of delight upon his face. He was beginning to appreciate Susan.

When they came into the kitchen where the stove that had cooked their late Sunday dinner was still sending out a little warmth, Stanhope raised the lantern aloft, and coming forward, let its light fall full upon Larsen's face, and the same light shining through the opposite side of the lantern enabled Susan to see his own.

What Stanhope saw was a haggard countenance with lips drawn and colorless, and hollow, burning, woful, wolfish eyes.

What Susan and Larsen saw was a very sleepy-looking young man, standing awkwardly and seeming abstracted and irresolute.

It was Larsen who spoke first, startled at sight of a strange face, where he had looked to see only John Warham's "hired man," and his voice was hollow and unsteady.

'What—who the devil are you? Take that thing out of my eyes!'

A moment Stanhope stared with seeming stupidity, then his half-closed eyes wandered to Susan's face and the arm that held the lantern dropped to his side.

"I—excuse me," he drawled, and voice and accent were so changed that Susan was startled and could hardly believe her ears. "I—I didn't think what I was doing; I was a—preoccupied. I think the old gentleman has been calling, madam."

Susan crossed the room and turned up the wick of the lamp burning dimly upon the kitchen dresser, and then caught a big time-worn Boston rocker by the back and propelled it forcibly toward the stove, turning as she placed it beside the hearth, so that, for a moment, she gave Stanhope the full benefit of her glance.

"I guess *you'd* better go and see to *him*," she said tartly; "he seems to think you're about right. *I've* got to look after this drowned rat first thing *I* do."

Stanhope put down the lantern hastily, making two or three awkward and unnecessary movements in so doing, after the manner of a well-disposed but undecided person who finds himself in an unexpected position.

"Certainly," he stammered, "with pleasure—I mean of course, anything that I can do, you know," and he backed himself into the doorway and so made an awkward exit.

"Sit down there," said Susan, briskly letting go of the chair, and making an attack upon the stove. "I'll have a good fire in a minute, and git you some dry clothes."

Larsen sank into the chair, but kept his eyes turned toward the door while he asked:

"Who's that—fellow?"

Susan gave the fire a parting poke, and went to the dresser and took down the lamp, flashing its light across his face as she carried it to the kitchen table and set it down.

"My," she said, "how ghastly you do look, as if you'd seen a ghost, or had a turn. Well, lightning never strikes twice in the same place they say, so tain't noways likely you'll ever be killed by lightning *now*," and then she added mentally as a sop to her inner consciousness, "More than likely you'll live to be hung though!" Then again aloud: "Who's that fellow? Why he's a sort of a half-breed I guess, lives over to Coopertown or somewhere about there—I most forget the place. He's heard about Bertha, and he's got a hankerin' to play detective; says he's a law student but thinks he's got a kind of talent for detective work. It's my opinion if he can't git around any livelier'n he did when he lit this lantern, he won't hurt nobody with his talent."

She was talking to gain time, for she felt sure that Stanhope wished her to remain with Larsen until he could relieve her, and she now began to fumble with the lantern.

"Drat the fellow!" she muttered, "whatever has he done to it!" Then seeming to succeed at last she opened it, and blew out the light, turning as she shut down the globe with a snap, and looking toward the door, through which Stanhope had gone. She had purposely seated Larsen with his back toward it.

"He seems to a-sort of got on the right side of John," went on Susan in a tone of disapproval. "He's offered to 'work up the case,' whatever he means by that,



for nothing—just for practice. It's my opinion it'll take a good deal of practice before he'll find Bertha Warham, though I don't believe in such proceedings. Get a real bony fidey *detective*—that's what *I* say."

Here she paused behind Larsen's chair, and cast an inquiring look at Stanhope, who, for several moments, had stood in the shadow of the door. It was in obedience to a gesture from him that she next spoke. "Oh, here he comes," a little under her breath then louder as if to reassert herself.

"Well, young man, what was the trouble?"

Stanhope crossed the room and stood over the stove, rubbing his palms softly together.

"Oh!" he said slowly, "only a—a little restless, that's all; I think he's getting feverish, Miss-- a Miss——"

"*Miss Harkins*," said Susan emphatically; "well, I'll give him his medicine in a minute. I've got to find some dry clothes first."

She took a second lamp from a shelf in the chimney corner, and while she lighted it, Stanhope looked down upon the man cowering in the Boston rocker, and asked suavely:

"How do you feel now, Mr.—a—"

"Mr. Larsen," broke in Susan. "Joe, this young man says his name is Brown, and may be it *is*; you needn't believe it if you don't want to, though."

And with this master-stroke she caught up the lamp and left the room.

The improbable Mr. Brown laughed softly, as if more at his ease in her absence, and thrusting his hands deep into his trouser's pockets he raised himself upon his tiptoes and then slowly let himself down again, jingling some keys the while.

"The old lady don't seem to take a liking to me," he said confidentially. "There seems to be a good deal of

snap about her," and he laughed broadly, and beamed upon Larsen, as if perfectly willing to let him into the joke.

But Larsen was in no mood for humor; he was making a desperate effort to pull himself together, and he had in part succeeded, before he said:

"She's sharp enough if you mean that, and she don't like *me* either; she's an old cat."

He shivered in his wet clothing and bent his eyes glaringly upon the fire.

"Let me help you off with that coat Mr.— a—Mr.—"

"Larsen."

"Mr.—a—Larsen. *Larsen* why, why your *the* Mr. Larsen who—excuse me. I—I'm *very* glad to meet you—the fact is I—"

"Yes, I know!" Larsen arose and began tugging at a wet sleeve. "You're a—detective."

"No, sir—no—not quite that," taking hold of the coat and drawing it off his shoulder. "Not *quite* that, not that I wouldn't like to be—a good detective, you know I'm just an amatuer, sir; but I do flatter myself that I have some little ability, some *little*. This sort of thing is very fascinating to me, Mr. Larsen, and I have a theory that a thing that attracts you, and fascinates you is the thing to take to."

"If you can get your hands on it," said Larsen grimly, shrugging himself out of the wet coat.

"Exactly!" said the amateur detective quite cheerfully; "exactly so sir."

Larsen favored him with a scowl from under his black brows, and began to tug at his wet boots; he was still working with the second boot when Susan re-entered with an armful of clothing.

"Now, Joe," she said briskly, "just you step in here,

and get into these dry things. It's been open all day and you won't get chilled."

The room indicated was a small one opening off the kitchen, having but one window, and no door, except that which opened kitchenward. It had been originally intended for a pantry or store room, but Susan, who had no fancy for sharing the family sitting-room, and the society of Mrs. John Warham, had appropriated it to her own use, as being "big enough for one," and overlooking her domain, the kitchen. She had her sewing-machine there, and there read her weekly paper on such Sunday afternoons as she did not spend in visiting some of her country neighbors, or being visited by them.

Susan threw open the door of her sanctum, carried the clothing within, returned for the lamp which she had put down in order to open the door, and when she had placed that upon a small table, called out:

"Come, Joe, you want to move quick or else you'll get a chill."

She stepped outside then, and, when Larsen had passed within, drew the door tight shut, and looked across the room at Stanhope, who was taking from his pocket a small note-book and pencil.

From the book he drew a card, and standing where his movements could not be too quickly seen were the door of the sanctum to open suddenly, he wrote a few words in bold black characters, then he held up the card and laid it upon the table with a noiseless gesture.

She understood him, crossed the room swiftly, took up the card and went out, to read it by the light of a candle burning upon a table near the open door of John Warham's bedroom.

The card contained these words:

"Manage that I shall sit up the rest of the night.



Say *you* are worn out and that Mr. W—— needs a watcher. Don't let Larsen go near him."

When Larsen came out from the sanctum, his step was firmer, and his manner quite collected. A desperate calm seemed to have settled upon his face, but his eyes smoldered in their dark caverns, and a dumb devil had perched upon his tongue.

He came to the fire, and seated himself in the rocker, leaning forward with his elbows upon his knees, and taking up the poker from the hearth, to shift it idly from hand to hand, while he looked keenly across the stove at Stanhope, who stood beside it, hands in pockets and tilting himself up and down from toe to heel, as at first. He seemed struggling to keep himself awake, and finally drew forth his right hand to press it against his mouth as if to stifle a yawn.

He made no attempt at conversation and Susan found them thus when, in a few moments, she came quietly in.

"I can't think where on earth you've hailed from, Joe Larsen," she said crisply, "but I guess you won't be above eatin' a bite if it's set before you. I ain't in no mood for askin' questions to-night, so I ain't a-going to bid you give an account of yourself. I guess, may be your coming just now's kind a-lucky, though; and may be this young man can get some ideas from you." She was moving about the kitchen as she talked, setting the coffee-pot on the stove, and putting dishes and glasses upon the kitchen-table. Suddenly, she stopped before Stanhope and seemed to hesitate.

"Young man," she said, at last, "you offered your services free enough a while ago; I hoped I wouldn't need them. But I am tireder than I knew. If you're really willing to set up the balance of the night, you can have my chance."

Stanhope seemed to make an amiable effort to rouse

himself. "Certainly," he said, "by all means. I'm not a bad nurse either, Miss Harkins."

"Well there won't be much *nursing* needed; you can set here in the kitchen, if you want to—I'll set out enough lunch for two, and you can kind o rouse him up and give him his medicine every two hours, but mind you don't let him talk, or try to talk to him. The doctor won't have it. Joe, you must not go near him yet—mind, it won't do to excite him."

She resumed her work of putting food upon the kitchen table, going to and from pantry to table, swiftly and noiselessly.

When all was done, she approached the hearth and said to Larsen:

"I have put this young man into the corner room, Joe; and so you'll have to take Mrs. Warham's for to-night, the others ain't in order."

Larsen had ceased to trifle with the poker, and was sitting with his head in his two hands, when she addressed him.

He started and uttered a sharp exclamation, lifted his head and dropped it again upon his hands.

"I don't want to sleep," he said, with his face thus concealed—I—I haven't got over that shock. I'll stay here."

"Well, you can do as you like," said Susan. "The room's ready, and a candle in it." She turned toward Stanhope, gave him some brief directions about the medicine, and then went her way, leaving the two men, hunter and hunted, face to face at midnight, in her cheery kitchen.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### SKILL VERSUS MUSCLE

When Susan had gone, Stanhope drew a chair up to the stove, and seated himself. It was an old-fashioned, splint-bottomed chair, with high, straight back, and broad arms—one of the few relics rescued by Susan, from the hands of the innovators.

It was comfortable enough, for a healthy young person, with naturally erect spinal column, and the young man, who called himself Brown, leaned his head against its back, rested his hands and elbows upon its arms, and looked through half-closed eyes at his "*vis a vis*."

For some time Larsen sat with his face hidden in his hands, then he arose and without once glancing at Stanhope, took the coffee-pot from the stove, and going to the table, poured for himself a brimming cup, strong and black. Then, like a man who has just discovered an appetite, he seated himself and began to eat rapidly, ravenously; he ate so long, and so much, that Stanhope grew interested in watching his performance, and he drank three cups of the black coffee, strong and hot, and undiluted with cream or sugar.

When he had finished, he brushed some crumbs from his knees, ran his long brown hand across his smooth heavy jaw, and arose and stood before Stanhope with his back to the fire.

"Well, I've made a meal," he said finally.

"Yes. I have observed it."



"You have," grimly, "what do you think of my appetite?"

"Very good, I should say, for a man of your size."

"My size! Yes," stretching himself to his full height and reaching out his brawny arms, too long for the sleeves that did not adorn them. "What do you think of my size anyhow?"

"Very good, I should say." Stanhope seemed to be struggling with a yawn. "Quite well grown, in fact."

Larsen let his arms drop to his sides, and stood for some moments glowering down at him. "Get up," he said finally. "Let's look at you."

Stanhope lifted one knee gently, and gently crossed it over the other.

"Excuse me, please," he said serenely. "I shouldn't show to advantage. You're a bigger man than I am." Then he lowered the knee again with deliberation, as though the exercise required extreme care.

"Upon consideration," he said, "I think I *will* get up," and he arose slowly and stood directly before Larsen.

For a moment neither spoke, then Stanhope said quietly:

"It's surprising how much one can see at a glance, in a flash, in fact. Now when I first saw you coming from the woods toward the house, I realized your bigness; took it all in at one wink, as it were, and when I saw you raise your arms, very much as you did just now, only perhaps with more energy, and, well, say *abandon*, all this by a second flash, I realized your bigness yet *more*. When I saw you *fall*,"—his eyes seemed taking in Larsen's whole face, and the change in his tone struck upon the senses of the other as if he had shut his hand upon a kitten's fur, and found it suddenly turned to stinging nettles in his grasp—"when I saw you fall, I realized your *weakness*."

"What do you mean?" gasped Larsen with a fierce oath. "I was stunned by the lightning."

"Oh no, you were *not*, not by *that* stroke, the lightning that struck you was inside you, my friend."

Larsen was pallid with rage, his eyes were blazing.

"What do you mean!" he hissed. "I advise you to watch that tongue of yours, sir."

"And I advise you not to try to intimidate a man, simply because you are a size bigger; it won't always work. I mean what I say. I saw your maneuvers from the window above, where I was sitting. I saw you fall—and I called Susan. Now if you want more conversation with me Mr. Larsen, talk respectfully. I'm not your enemy, at this present moment; I'm even disposed to be your friend if you need one. But don't bluster, it irritates me."

He sat down as he uttered these last words and resumed his former listless position.

Larsen's wrath seemed cooling. "Well!" he said slowly, "you *are* a cool one—I don't believe you're such a fool as Susan takes you for."

"Does Susan take me for a fool? Well I can't resent that, we are hardly acquainted as yet. I hope I'm *not* a fool—and I hope you're not."

He drew a cigar-case from his pocket and carefully selected a cigar.

"I was smoking when you made your appearance out there. You rather interrupted me, perhaps you'll have a cigar, and if you'll sit down and stop staring at me I'll be obliged."

Larson sat down upon the kitchen chair which he had lately occupied—rather, he took it by the back, swung it in front of him and bestrode it, crossing his arms upon its back and looking over them at his cool companion; but he took no notice of the proffered cigar case.

"You're the coolest fellow *I* ever saw," he growled resentfully. "I wish *I* could keep as cool."

Stanhope put away the cigar case, lighted a cigar and bent forward to throw the charred match upon the hearth, brushing Larsen's shoulder as he did so, then he shut his lips upon his weed, and drew upon it until a bright fire glowed at the end.

"You can't," he said then; "it isn't in you. I should think you'd be apt to get into trouble frequently with that devil of a temper, and your lack of self-control. I tell you that a man without self-control is a poor fellow, even if he's as big as you."

"Perhaps I don't lack that as much as you think," said Larsen slowly.

"Oh yes, you do. You can keep your mouth shut, but you can't keep it *still*; your lips will twitch, your facial muscles be all a-quiver; why, you can't even keep your *hands* still!"

Larsen looked down at his clinched hands, and bit his lips. "If you are trying my temper," he said, "you are in a fair way to get a sample of it."

"Bah!" said Stanhope closing his eyes. "Don't threaten *me*."

Larsen sprang up with an unmistakable gesture of rage, and for a moment stood glowering over Stanhope, who with his head tilted back, his hands resting lightly upon either arm of the big chair and his knees crossed, smoked calmly on; then he turned and began to pace up and down the kitchen.

"I think," murmured Stanhope after a time, "that you would better close that door, and then if you should happen to say anything it won't wake the sleepers. I have observed that your voice is not particularly melodious, and that you modulate it with difficulty."

A little to his surprise Larsen crossed the room,



closed the door, and came back and stood again before him.

"Susan says you're trying to work up this case of—of disappearance," he said.

"Susan did not utter a falsehood."

"Umph! and you're playing yourself for a lawyer fellow from some country town—a raw hand."

"That's what I'm 'playing myself for.'"

"Do you suppose I believe that?"

"Believe what?"

"That you're a green one. Not in the regular business."

"My dear sir, I am delighted! You do not consider me 'green' then. Thank you, and let me assure you that I'm *not* green; in my own estimation I'm a very much ripened young man, for my years."

"Oh—well you've got a good opinion of yourself. How long have you been here?"

Stanhope looked at his watch and seemed to be making a nice mental calculation.

"Let me see, something over thirty-five hours I should say." He did not seem to remember that this time included only his latest visit.

"Ugh! well what have you found out?"

"Several things. I've found out for one thing that you were somewhat interested in—this missing young lady."

Larsen winced, and bit his under lip.

"And I've also found out that there are people in the neighborhood who don't hesitate to think and say that you know more about this disappearance than you choose to tell."

Larsen swung round upon his heel and took a restless turn across the room.

"Well—what else do they say?" he demanded, coming back to his old position. "And who are they that say t.

"Perhaps I'll furnish you with a list of them some day, but not at present. They say that you were not visible in this neighborhood when Bertha Warham vanished, but that you came back in a few days, and was *not quite yourself*."

"They do! Curse them! Not quite myself wasn't I? How could I be? everybody in this county knows that I worshiped that girl's shadow, yes—and they laughed at it."

Stanhope, who was deliberately goading him on, hoping to drive him beyond the bounds of prudence and so wring from him some word or words, that would furnish him with a little much-needed light, now laughed lightly.

"Yes, but they say that it was that very *shadow* that was troubling you. That *her death* lies at your door."

"*Her death?*" the laugh had thrown him off his guard; "Bertha's death!" He clutched his hands together and wrung them fiercely. "I'd give a fortune—I'd give my life to know that she *was* dead, to see her this moment lying dead before me. But she's *not* dead, curse her! she's alive, and I'll find her yet, if I have to hunt a lifetime!"

Stanhope had accomplished his purpose. Before the passion-goaded man could recover himself, a firm hand clutched his collar, he was twisted about like a child in the grasp of a giant, and literally dropped into the chair which the wily detective had just vacated with a bound. All trace of languor and cool indifference was gone. Heat and light, force and fire shone upon Larsen from the face of the young man now standing over him. Yes, and a strong menace too.

"So I have landed you at last, Mr. Larsen," said Stanhope in a cold, hard, resolute tone that was yet scarcely above a whisper. "I *thought* I should do it. Now, listen

to me, before you leave that chair you will tell me what part you have played in this affair, or you'll go straight from this kitchen to the Upton jail, accused of Bertha Warham's murder."

"Who'll take me there?" hissed Larsen, frothing at the lips.

"I will, and I'll do it single-handed! Oh, you needn't writhe and grimace; I know your fingers itch, but you hadn't better overestimate your brute strength. You are unarmed, and I don't want to draw a weapon upon you, but you're at my mercy. If you don't believe it—"

With the snarl of a fierce animal ensnared, Larsen sprang from the chair, and rushed upon him with brawny fist upraised, then came the sound of a stinging blow and he fell heavily.

Stanhope had moved lightly aside, caught the uplifted arm and delivered a "left-hander" which made him victor in that round at least.

When Susan, startled and alarmed by the heavy thud of Larsen's big body upon her kitchen floor, came hurrying into the room candle in hand, she found Stanhope upon one knee beside the prostrate man, who had just opened his eyes and was gazing with a bewildered look straight into the face bent above him.

"What is it?" asked Susan breathlessly. "I thought—I was afraid—" then she stopped, her eyes encountering Stanhope's meaning smile.

"Its another stroke of lightning, Miss Susan. He's all right I guess. Do you feel like getting up, Larsen? He looked to see returning anger in his assailant's face, but the puzzled look only deepened as Larsen raised himself upon one elbow, and then with a lift from Stanhope, came slowly to his feet.

"Sit down," said the detective pushing the splint-bottomed chair toward him. "You'll be all right presently,"



and Larsen knew that Stanhope, for the time at least, would spare him. He knew too, in the same moment, that Susan's solicitude had been not for himself but for the young detective.

He sat weakly down in the big chair, and looked from one to the other with a stare so meaningless, a face so worn, and dull, and woful, that Stanhope felt a thrill of compunction and pity not unmixed with surprise.

He had looked for an outburst of rage, sullen fury, or silent menacing resentment, and was quite prepared for either, but the man's dull apathy was unaccountable.

At the back of the large kitchen, in the corner remotest from the stove, and the doors of pantry and store-rooms, was a large old-fashioned couch, Susan called it a "settee", and to this Stanhope pointed as he said to the spinster:

"Can't you make him some sort of comfortable bed there, Miss Susan? He's in need of rest and sleep, I should say; a stroke of lightning and a drenching—not to mention this last fall—is enough to unsettle any man."

When Susan went out to fetch blankets and pillows, he said quietly to Larsen:

"Something worse than my blow has unhinged you, my friend! of course *we* understand that. I don't want to be hard upon you; I'll be fair, if you will; lie down there and rest; we can talk to-morrow."

The black eyes stared vacantly at him, and the pale lips twitched, but no sound came from them. When Susan came back, he watched her movements listlessly, and when the couch was spread he threw himself upon it heavily, and lying prone upon his back with his arms above his head, stared with open but unseeing eyes straight at the ceiling.

For more than an hour he lay thus moveless and wide-eyed, as weak as a child. A long physical and mental

strain had reached its climax in his fierce attack upon Stanhope, and his bodily strength was gone, but a stubborn will, stronger even than that great sinewy body, was still urging him to mental activity; he had a difficult problem to grapple with, and his brain would not cease its efforts.

During a long hour Stanhope yawned more than once but he forbore to speak. He poured for himself a cup of coffee and drank it leisurely, smoked a cigar, made a few entries in his note-book, and looked at his watch, at intervals.

Finally, when more than an hour had passed, Larsen lifted his arms and turned upon his side, with his face toward Stanhope.

"I have been thinking," he said, in a strange hollow voice, "and after I rest, in the morning, I want to talk with you—before you say anything about—about this business or me, to anyone," there was something almost appealing in his tone.

"All right, Larsen," responded Stanhope cheerfully; "I think we can manage to understand each other, in the morning."

Even as he spoke, Larsen's eyes began to close; he rolled heavily over, and lying face downward, seemed composing himself for sleep. In a few moments he was breathing heavily, his long guttural respirations accompanied by the nervous twitches and starts of the worn-out sleeper.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### A STRANGE CONFESSION

During the remainder of the night, or to be exact, during the early morning hours, Joseph Larsen slept heavily, while Stanhope watched and yawned. A little before daylight, when the latter crossed the sitting-room to give the sick man his medicine, according to Susan's instructions, he found him lying wide awake and seemingly quite at ease and free from fever symptoms.

"Did Susan say that Joe Larsen was here?" he asked feebly, "or did I dream it?"

"Larsen is here," said the detective quietly.

"Oh, well, take my advice and keep your eye on him."

"I mean to."

"He's a big brawny fellow, young man."

"Yes, he tried to impress that upon me a little while ago.

"Did he? Confound his impudence! Tell me about it."

"Not to-night, Mr. Warham. Its contrary to my orders from Miss Susan, and I'm a good deal more afraid of her than I am of Larsen."

"Umph! well, look out. Joe's tricky."

"Yes. He tried one of his tricks on me, and I knocked him down. Brute force don't always win in this country, Mr. Warham. Now don't ask any more questions. Leave Larsen to me."

The old man gulped down his medicine and grinned with delight.

"You knocked him down did you? by—! knocked Joe



Larsen down! well I can sleep on that! I shouldn't wonder if it cured me; *you*—knocked him down! well! keep him out of *my* sight, youngster; I don't want to see him—not yet."

When Larsen awoke it was plain that he was practicing self-control—repressing himself. He sat at the breakfast table opposite Stanhope, looking very haggard and dejected, only speaking when he was addressed, but answering then quite calmly, although in few and brief syllables.

Shortly before sunrise, Susan had reappeared in the kitchen and driven Stanhope from the field, telling him that he could have just two hour's sleep, before breakfast time, and promising to call him should Larsen show signs of waking.

"But he won't," she had said; "when a man sleeps like *that* he generally has to be waked up."

And so it proved; Stanhope came downstairs without waiting to be called, but Larsen slept on until Susan wakened him.

After breakfast Larsen arose from the table, and looking down at Stanhope, who still held his coffee cup, said with an air of dogged resolution:

"I want to have a talk with you; where shall it be?"

"It had better be upstairs," broke in Susan. "You're liable to be interrupted out on the stoop, or in the doorway. Besides John might happen to hear ye down here; he's wide awake this mornin'. The sleepin' stuff's all out of his head. You'd better go up to your room, young man."

"You are right, Miss Susan," said Stanhope, "I believe you are always right. Upstairs it is, Mr. Larsen."

It was a light cheery chamber, and Larsen as he entered looked about him with the air of a man familiar with his surroundings, yet, somehow, startled or strange.

"Oh!" he said with a queer husky intonation. "This room is it? The first time I ever saw this room I was—"

He checked himself, and sat suddenly down in an arm-chair by the window.

"Go on," said Stanhope, bringing forward a second chair, and seating himself opposite, and quite near. "The first time you saw this room, what happened? Say your say; its what we're here for."

"It's not what *I'm* here for;" said Larsen doggedly. "I made up my mind before I went to sleep, that I'd have an understanding with you this morning; and *that's* what I'm here for."

"Oh!" said Stanhope dryly. "I thought we came to a sort of an understanding last night."

Larsen took no notice of the jibe; he was looking intently at the carpet, his lips tightly compressed and his hands locked together. He seemed to be studying his next word. Finally he said:

"If you see fit to play yourself on the Upton folks for a green hand you can do so. But I know old John Warham; if he's harboring you, and depending on you, as he seems to be, it's because he's *hired* you to do his work; and if he don't *know* you, you've had to come mighty well recommended too. If you'd have come here as you *say*, or Susan says you did, on your own hook, and without any recommendations, he'd have fired you out too quick."

"That is your opinion," suggested Stanhope.

"You can call it what you like; it's a fact." He raised his big black somber eyes from the floor and fixed them upon Stanhope's face.

"I want you to talk fair with me;" he said. "You have a good opinion of yourself. I don't know who you are, but if you're a detective at all or a lawyer either, you're a good one. Look at me: I suppose you think

you can read human nature like a book. Am I going to lie to you?"

"My dear sir, whatever else I may be, I am *not* a second-sight-seer. I really can't tell—yet."

"Well, will you answer a few straight questions?"

"Ask them."

"Are you going to try and find Bertha Warham?"

"Yes."

"And do you expect to succeed?"

Stanhope was looking at him now straight into his eyes. "With your assistance," he said slowly, "I do."

"Then listen to me. If there is a man alive who can find that girl, that man I will follow to the ends of the world! I will be his dog, his slave. If any man has a right to know where she is, *I* am that man! Convince me that you can find her, and I am your shadow. If I thought you were on her track I would dog you to the last day of my life, or yours."

"Well," said Stanhope with sphinx-like calm, "*I'm on her track.*"

"Before I went away from Upton," went on Larsen in a hoarse monotone, "I knew what people said; the fools! I went away to *look* for her, I came back because I had failed; and I hoped that something new might have been discovered here. I knew that John Warham had sent to the city for a detective."

"Did you know *that* before you went away?" broke in Stanhope quickly.

Larsen's lips twitched, his hands clasped and unclasped themselves convulsively.

"No matter how I knew it, or when. It was this that brought me here; you felt inclined to detain me by force last night—if you could; you did not know that I do not mean to let *you* out of my sight."



"Really," said Stanhope. "How fortunate that our regard is mutual."

"I don't want to hamper your actions," went on Larsen doggedly, "but I want you to make me a promise, and that is that you will not tell John Warham or anyone what I am about to tell you until this business is ended. You may *act* upon it in any way you like; you may put me under arrest if you choose. I came up here to tell you what I know—*all* that I know about—Bertha Warham."

He got up and walked two or three times across the room; his voice had broken as he spoke her name.

"You may say what you want to say," there was a touch of skeptical coldness in Stanhope's voice. "If I think you are telling the truth—*all* the truth, I'll be fair enough with you."

Larsen came back to the window and sat down again opposite Stanhope. He passed his hand once or twice across his face and seemed to be composing himself by a strong effort. There was something almost dignified in his manner as he began:

"It is not from fear or shame, that I want to keep my affairs from the Upton gossips. I have always done the same, or tried to. I don't know how it is, or why it is, but the whole community has seemed to be against me from the first. I have never been a popular fellow, I've never made friends like other fellows of my age. I've never had the way that takes with women, young and old. I wasn't born a talker. When other fellows could laugh and joke and pay compliments, my tongue was tied. I've stood many a time in a crowd at some of our little social gatherings and watched the boys paying court to girls that they didn't care for, just for the fun of the thing, and I've wondered how they did it, while I stood back in a corner tongue-tied and awkward, feeling as if my hands and feet were all there

was of me, and tingling to the roots of my hair when the girls tried to drag me out, as they sometimes did, to join in their games, or to dance when partners were scarce. I couldn't dance; I was too big and too awkward and I couldn't bear to be laughed at. Sometimes I think that it was my silence and my awkwardness that first made Bertha notice me; she knew that the boys chaffed me, as much as they dared, and the girls openly made game of me. I've never had any too much happiness in this world; 'stupid', and 'sullen', and 'awkward', I've been called these for pet names ever since I can remember. I was an adopted child, and the woman I have always called mother is the sister of—of old Warham's wife. I was taught to call her aunt, and she always made me welcome here. Bertha began to twist me around her finger when we were little children. I have worshiped her ever since I can remember. I think she used to like me, too. It was in her nature to befriend any forlorn, friendless creature; and, except for her, I was forlorn and friendless enough. I humored all her whims, and she had a good many; I helped her out of any mischief she chose to get into, and kept all her secrets; I've been punished more than once for something that she did. And when she pitied me and called me her poor old Joe, her very best friend, I was content. John Warham never liked me; he used to say rough unkind things to me when I came here, but this only made Bertha stand up for me, and confide in me the more. She grew so used to me—I was always so ready, and willing, and meek—that I suppose she felt as if she couldn't do without me; she petted me, and ruled me as if I were a big Newfoundland or a slave that she owned body and soul. She accepted my worship as a thing of course, and—when we became engaged—she was very young, and it seemed to come

.

about quite naturally—I never thought to inquire if she cared for *me*. I knew that I loved her, and that I was necessary to her; and that was enough."

He paused for a moment and turned his face toward the window. Then he shifted his position slightly, drew a long shuddering breath, and resumed.

"The change began when she went away to school for the first time. I knew that she was bright, and I was dull. I don't think she thought of that at all, herself—not at first, but *I* knew it, and although I hated books and study, I tried to learn for her sake. When she went away to school I went too, not with her of course, nor near her, but to an academy for boys that was recommended by—by Mrs. John Warham. But while she was away learning to do without me—forgetting me, I only thought of her more and more, I thought of nothing else."

Again he paused, there was a strange kindling of the haggard face, a restlessness as of some latent growing excitement, showing plainly through words and movements; evidently self-repression was becoming painful to him. He drew his chair away from the window and turned his back to the light.

"There are some things that a man can't talk about," he went on hoarsely. "Bertha had tried me in a good many ways, but she never made me jealous; she wasn't a flirt by nature; there was always plenty of young fellows ready to pay court to her, but they didn't understand her as I did. They didn't know her ways and fall in with her whims, they thought too much of themselves, and not enough of her. She liked to rule me and have her own way, and enjoy her day-dreams, better than she liked their society. She lived in a kind of a world of her own, and I fancy my one merit, in her eyes, was that I knew when to speak and when to

.



keep still. But, after she came back from school the first time, it was different. I knew that she was changing, but I wouldn't let myself believe it. I fought it off and I tried so hard to please her, was so meek and humble, that she couldn't quarrel with me, but I knew that it was coming—she had had a taste of power, she had found out that she was not a commonplace girl, and Upton grew too small, the farm too tame, and my idolatry too monotonous and too old a story.

"One day she brought home with her for a visit a town girl, one of your pink and white blonde-headed, laughing, twisting, silly little things, as different from herself as could be, and they began to ride and dance with the Upton fellows, and of course they had their pick. Rose was a born flirt, and Bertha liked the fun and excitement. There were two young men who were here almost constantly, one of them, the one who generally went with Bertha, was engaged to a young lady who was away from home, and he and Bertha seemed to have a sort of understanding. I couldn't stand it, and so when I saw them driving out here with their buggies, or cantering up on their mustangs, I came too, and sometimes I suppose I spoiled their party, and upset their plans. I didn't remonstrate with Bertha—I didn't dare—and I didn't know how.

"One day, one Sunday morning, I rode over early and was sitting on the porch talking with the girls when the two drove up each with his buggy. I expected to see some disappointed faces and perhaps get some hints, but I had made up my mind to stand my ground. I was feeling sulky in the beginning; and when I saw how jolly they all were, and how little my sulks seemed to disturb them, it made me wild with rage. They all knew how matters stood between us, and they threw

out sly hints, that I could not take up nor resent, and that Bertha only laughed at. Just before dinner we sat out on the porch and they were all so merry, and so regardless of me, that I couldn't endure it. I got up and went into the parlor and threw myself down upon the sofa. I was burning, boiling. I felt as if a devil had got hold of me; but it was a dumb devil. By and by I heard them all burst out laughing, and then Bertha came in, the laugh still on her lips. She came to me and put her hand on my shoulder and said something in her light careless way. But I couldn't have answered her to save my life. She turned away from me with a little shrug, and sat down at the piano and sang something, a gay little piece that I never had heard before; she sat quite near me, and I got up and went and sat on the further side of the room, as far away as I could get. When she finished her song she turned and asked me if I had heard it before and if I liked it. I didn't answer her; I didn't dare to, for I knew that I would rave if I spoke at all. Then she got up and walked past me like a queen. 'I won't insist upon your talking, Joe,' she said, 'but I think you are making a mistake.'

"I had taken a chair by the window and I could hear what they said outside; I don't think Bertha thought I would hear, but perhaps she did not care.

"'Why don't you teach that fellow a lesson,' Rose Hildreth said in her pert little tone that I hated.

"'Oh,' said Bertha carelessly, 'I don't know how; I'm such a good-natured person.'

"Then they all laughed, and I heard young Harney say: 'Suppose you let me help you, Miss Bertha; I should think a crisis would be desirable.'

"'It would,' said Bertha. 'But I'd like to know how you would manage it, when a man won't talk—'

"‘Oh!’ cries Rose Hildreth—‘the Lord deliver me from a sulking man.’

"‘Amen,’ I heard Bertha say.

"‘Miss Bertha,’ says Harney, ‘suppose you and I take a drive after dinner?’ ‘Capital,’ says the other fellow. ‘Good,’ says Rose. ‘But you won’t *dare*, will you, Bertha?’ she knew that would settle it, and it did.

"At dinner Bertha sat between Susan and young Harney, and I was at the other end of the table. I couldn’t get a word with Bertha and I had made up my mind to speak. Just as we were leaving the table, young Harney spoke up, very cool and careless: ‘Miss Bertha,’ he says, ‘shall we go for that little drive now?’ then I turned around and looked at him. ‘Bertha *can’t go*,’ I said. He just laughed and says again, ‘How is it, Miss Bertha?’

"‘Oh,’ she says as sweet and calm as could be, ‘It’s just as Joe says of course.’

"They all laughed, and the two fellows went out to the barn, while I, like a blind fool, followed the girls out to the front porch. There was very little said as we sat there. Rose hummed softly and fidgeted with her ribbons, and Bertha sat on one of the steps looking up at the clouds, as cool and careless as I ever saw her in my life. I was anything but cool. I began to think I had made a fool of myself. By and by Rose got up and walked past me into the house; she came back again in a minute and stood in the doorway, but I couldn’t see her without moving, and I was too sulky to turn around. In a minute more I heard a buggy coming around the drive; it was Harney with his two bays, and Gordon, the other fellow was in the buggy with him; just as they came around the curve at the corner of the house, Rose skipped out of the doorway and stood between Bertha and me, and I saw that she had Bertha’s hat and shawl



in her hands; at that minute the buggy stopped before the steps; it was all done in a flash, Gordon jumped out of the buggy, Rose tossed the hat and shawl to Bertha, and before I could move, Gordon was helping her in beside Harney. I jumped up then, and ran blindly down the steps; I almost had my hand upon the bridle; but Harney laid on the whip and they were off. They were very quiet, and Bertha did not look back, but Rose and Gordon laughed, and chaffed me, until I rushed away half-mad."

He paused again, fairly writhing in his chair; his lips twitched, and the hand that he lifted to his face was tremulous. Stanhope's own face had grown quite grave, but he made no comment, and sat still, his eyes fixed upon his companion's face.

In a moment Larsen resumed his story, speaking now in short jerky sentences, with frequent pauses between, as if the words were dragged forth by an effort of will, and that effort a torture which he longed to end.

"Rose Hildreth went home that week. I staid away until I knew she was gone and then I went to see Bertha. It was the next Sunday morning. I had been in torment all the week, and I went early, determined to humble myself, and to have it over—it *was* over—very soon. Bertha came downstairs and out upon the porch where I stood waiting; she didn't waste words, but came and stood straight before me, looking as calm as could be, but just a little bit pale. She told me that she would have no words with me, none were needed, and they would do no good—she did not want to reproach me, there was no need and—she supposed that I was not to blame for my disposition. She had seen for a long time that we—*we*—had made a mistake—I was narrow-minded, selfish, exacting. I had worn out her patience long ago, but she wanted to be just—she had given me trial

after trial, and at last her patience and her respect for me were gone together. I had gone on nursing my sullenness, my furious temper, until they had mastered me, but they should not master her. She had done with me, and she advised me to go quietly, not to make a scene. She was not afraid of me, and I could not alter her decision. When she had said her say she went quietly into the house, and I staggered off into the woods and stayed there all day. That was last fall—more than nine months ago.

"I wrote her two or three wild letters, and several times, I contrived to see her, and implored and prayed; finally I fell into a sort of despairing stupor; I would go to the house almost every day and follow aunt—Mrs. Warham—around and look at Bertha—I didn't try to talk with her often. Finally she accepted old March down at Upton, and I felt half-sure that she wanted to get away from the farm and from me. I knew she did not care for him. I am coming now, to the part of my story that you may not want to believe, and here I want you to make me a promise."

Stanhope's eyes were looking him through and through. "What is it?" he said, briefly.

"I want you to promise not to tell what I am about to tell you, to John Warham, or any of his people, nor to any one in Upton and this vicinity. You may have to call in help—I think it quite likely—and you are at liberty to tell as many detectives as you like. But until you have found Bertha Warham, or failed to find her and given up the case, you are not to speak of this to any one here."

"What if I refuse?" queried Stanhope.

"Then I have said my say."

"Well. You have my promise, and I am a man of my word," said the detective. "Go on."

'I was here quite often as the time for Bertha's wedding drew near," went on Larsen. "Nobody knew how often Bertha and I talked together; I kept a calm outward appearance, but I begged her to take me back, up to the very last. Finally, she consented."

He had been talking with his eyes turned away, but he now turned about, and fixed them upon Stanhope almost defiantly. "She consented to run away with me—and she did the planning herself."

He stopped again evidently expecting from his auditor some comment or sign of surprise, but Stanhope sat immovable and he went on again.

"A week before the time fixed for the wedding I went away and they all thought it was because I didn't want to be at the wedding. On the night that she disappeared I was back. I drove across the country twenty miles with two good horses; I put the ladder up to the window and she came down upon it. She had disarranged the room herself."

He got up and began to walk up and down the floor, his hands locked together and working convulsively.

"Well?" said Stanhope, coolly following him with his eyes.

"Bertha had told me what to do while I was in the city, and I had engaged a room for her in a little out-of-the-way hotel, that was neat and decent enough, and was kept by honest folks. When I took her into my buggy that night, she carried no baggage, except a small hand-sachel, and we drove across to Rivers, where I left the team, and took the early morning train for the city. She stayed alone on the little platform, while I took the team around to the stable, where I got it; and the passengers on board the train were too sleepy to notice us. We went on board separately, and did not speak on the way.



When we reached the city, I took her straight to her hotel; she did not register, and I left her in the parlor. she was to wait for me, while I hurried back to Upton, to throw the people off the scent, and pretend to join in the fuss and cry, when her absence was discovered."

He turned in his walk, and stopped short. Stanhope had risen, and was standing before him with folded arms.

"Go on," he said imperiously.

"When I went back to the city," said Larsen, his hands writhing and his lips livid, "she was *gone*. I questioned and searched; I raved and cursed; I nearly went mad; I advertised, I set spies out to look for her, I haunted hotels, theaters, any place where I thought she might be. After more than a week of wild search, I came back here with my mind made up to see the detective John Warham had sent for, and to tell him the truth. Find her for me! I'll go over all the ground with you; I'll do your bidding."

His voice broke, he resumed his restless walk to and fro. Stanhope looked after him, a frown wrinkling his brow.

"I'm afraid you've forgotten something," he said sharply. Didn't you write Miss Warham some threatening letters?"

"Yes," replied the other promptly, "I did, one especially."

"Ugh! I should say so! and what did she write you in return?"

"Nothing."

"Take care!"

"Nothing; I tell you she never answered me, never wrote me a line after she broke with me that Sunday."

"She wrote you," said Stanhope steadily, "a long letter in which she spoke of a secret which concerned you, and which was in part her reason for breaking with you."

She closed her letter by assuring you that she would keep that secret. My friend, you had better make a clean breast of it."

Larson turned upon him fiercely.

"It's a lie!" he cried. "I never received such a letter. I know of no such secret. What do you mean? I tell you that I have been half-mad for weeks; do you want to drive me wholly out of my senses?"

"No, but let me warn you if you don't stop indulging in these satanic moods of yours, you will be more than half-mad. When a man can't control his temper he is on the high road to lunacy. I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Larsen, taking it for granted that you have told me the truth, I can see *clearly* why Bertha Warham ran away, *with* you first, and *from* you afterward."

"Why, why, why!"

"Never mind why. There's an if in the way. I'm by no means sure that you *have* told me the truth. I begin to suspect that you're a shrewder fellow than you look, my dear sir."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this: I can see plainly, having heard your little story, and witnessed these little ebullitions of temper, how, from motives of revenge, you might have decoyed Bertha Warham from her home first, and murdered her afterward. My faith in you is not great, Mr. Joseph Larsen. You've got to convince my senses. In the meantime I guess you had better consider yourself under arrest."

Again, as on the night before, Larsen sprang toward him livid with rage—panting and glaring like a wild beast. Stanhope stepped nimbly back, and presented something coldly glittering in the face of the furious man. He halted suddenly, looking, as he stood, like a paralyzed demon.

"There's something marvelously soothing about a self-cocking revolver," remarked the detective as he moved backward toward the door, keeping Larsen well covered with the weapon. Then he threw the door wide open and called "Susan!"

In a moment they heard Susan's firm foot coming quickly up the stairs.

"Susan," said Stanhope speaking over his shoulder, "you need not mind about coming in. You see the situation. Where are the hired men?"

"They're around the place doing the chores," said Susan, staring from one to the other. "They sleep at the barn, you know."

"Well, Susan, send the quickest and most sensible one to Upton at once for a notary and the sheriff. We must have them at once; Mr. Larsen and I will be obliged to entertain each other, as you see, until they come. I say, Susan, did that fellow ever have a fit?"

"Not that I ever heard of."

"Well, he looks like having one now; hurry, Susan."

To his surprise Susan crossed the threshold and came slow beside him. "May be you'd better go yourself," she suggested in a low tone. "Give me that pistol and I'll look after him."

"Susan," said Stanhope with a short laugh, "it breaks my heart that I can't look at you. You're a woman worth looking at, but I can't accept your offer; send the man."

"The men are fools!" snapped Susan, turning away. "I'll go myself."



## CHAPTER XXX

### THE POINT OF VIEW

*From Mrs. Jacob Baring to a friend in Philadelphia.*

"DEAR FRIEND: Your very entertaining letter of some weeks since was deserving of a more speedy answer, but, as you know, I am not at any time a prompt correspondent, and, just now I am somewhat given over to affairs that in reality are not mine, but which interest me immensely, even to the neglect of my friends, you will say; nevertheless, I think you may find an interest in them too, when I tell you that they are the affairs of Ellen Jernyngham.

"In spite of your fears and my predictions Ellen has found a *fiance* who suits her; and whom she seems to suit.

"Does not this furnish you food for some reflection?

"You know Ellen as I do—how her pride has held her aloof from the lovers who flock naturally about a beauty who is also an heiress, and how in spite of her good looks and her wealth she has not seemed to attract those of her set whom she *might*, perhaps have considered eligible.

"Ellen, as you know is a favorite of mine; but I cannot be blind to the fact, that, in spite of her good looks, which are undeniable, and her style, which is perfection, her fine education and admirable conversational powers when she chooses to converse, her splendid family, and, I name it last, her wealth, she has not for the many, those mysterious qualities which go to make what we call an *attractive* woman.

"One man, however, has found her attractive, and he has proven himself a man worthy of her consideration. Mr. Jermyn is an Englishman of unimpeachable descent, the younger son in fact of an English nobleman, *Sir Ralph Foster Jermyn*. We might say that this engagement is the result of accident, for Mr. Jermyn, who is a studious man with literary tendencies, came to our village unheralded, and not intending to make his true status known. He came simply for a quiet summer's recreation, hoping to find retreat where he could pursue his favorite studies, and see and learn something of the 'average American village.' He certainly has gained some new ideas on this latter subject, for he had been but a few days in Roseville when his landlady, a vulgar village gossip, found among his books and papers, a letter from his father containing bits of family history which convinced her that she was harboring, if not an 'angel unawares,' at least a very distinguished guest, whose father was a member of the British nobility, and who had left that father's house because he preferred freedom, rather than a titled bride.

"The woman who had made the discoveries imparted her secret to a person who was shrewd enough to see the possible advantage to herself of keeping silence on the subject, and the gentleman enjoyed for a time his peaceful seclusion, but gossip will not remain smothered, and slowly it crept from lip to lip until all Roseville was in possession of the secret.

"I must say that M. Jermyn's deportment throughout the ordeal of village notoriety, (the word is more apt than it seems), was perfection itself. He has a most happy manner, not haughty, and yet upon certain people it has the effect of *hauteur*. He is far from condescending, nor yet has he that ungracious air that some of our young people find so objectionable in Ellen. It is

a perfect manner and therefore impossible to describe. I am obliged to confess that he is, to me, a trifle incomprehensible, so quiet in his manner, so unruffled in his calm, so perfect his ease under circumstances and mid surroundings that must be novel to him. He is reserved, almost unapproachable, and all with an unconscious air of believing himself a very simple open book; and yet you feel, you know, there are limits which you cannot pass.

'He suits Ellen perfectly; she is proud of him, and they make a fine-looking couple; he is slender and fair, with handsome, regular features, and the shapeliest of hands and feet. Lillian declares that they might fulfill their mission here below by posing as statues of aristocratic perfection, but you know Lillian.

"The wedding will take place soon, I think. I did not suppose that Ellen would consent to so short an engagement, but he seems to possess her completely, and it is his wish. It will be a quiet wedding, again at Mr. Jermyn's desire, but you may be sure that it will be very elegant as well. Ellen has no near relatives, and I hope to gain her consent, and his, to a plan I have made. I want her to return, after her necessary journey to the city, to attend to the preparations of her trousseau, and be married at 'The Hills.' I think Mr. Jermyn will favor my plan, and depend upon him to win Ellen over.

"Our little summer party has been a very pleasant one; I have found in it but one discordant element, and that in the too frequent presence of the young person I have told you of in whom Kenneth took such an interest. I do not like her, but she has made herself a favorite with our young people, through the possession of that same nameless attractiveness, which poor Ellen lacks. Whatever this quality is, Rene Brian certainly possesses it. She is pretty and has a certain piquancy, but in looks



Ellen surely is her equal, and in style and manner greatly her superior, and yet I have fancied, and so I think has Ellen, that this girl has almost succeeded in establishing herself as a rival. Certainly Mr. Jermyn regards her with interest, but it is a frank interest; he tells Ellen that she is an 'uncommon type.' She is an unpleasant 'type,' to me. I think that she is still interested in Kenneth, who is somewhere in the Southern States; sometimes I think they correspond; it would be like her. She has a brother who is quite too attentive to one of my nieces, the youngest of the Baring girls. But I am wearying you with my gossip.

"If Ellen's marriage occurs here I shall expect you to come.

"Remember me to the many in whom we are mutually interested, and inform me in your next of the happenings in our city. I am behind the times.

"Yours most sincerely,            HENRIETTA R. BARING."

*From Miss Jernyngham to her most intimate friend.*

"HORTENSE, MY DEAR FRIEND:

"Your very welcome letter with its cordial invitation is now before me. A few weeks ago I should have said without hesitation, yes, I will go with you, to make my home under those sunny Italian skies we both love so well. And I would have turned my back upon my native land with all its flaunt and show, its great littleness and little greatness, its *parvenues* and place-hunters, with no deep feeling of regret; for what would I leave behind? A few sincere friends, and many who are friends only in outward seeming; no near relatives, for my recreant half-brother, my nearest in this world, is, no one knows where. He left his home so long ago, and has been so long silent that I have ceased to hope for his return; in fact I begin to fear it almost, for what

may not ten long years of wandering have made of him? But I digress. I might have shared your voluntary exile gladly, for I believed that there was nothing here to keep me, or to care for. But all this is changed.

"Once in our intimate, pleasant school-girl friendship you extracted, almost extorted from me a promise; and you gave me one in return. Your promise—we will not speak now of mine—it has reached the time of its fulfillment. He has come at last—that prince of whom you desired to hear—and according to my school day contract, I write you, first of all, the news of my betrothal to Edward Poinsett Jermyn, the son of an English peer.

"I will not describe him to you—you who know me must, I think, feel assured that he has more than his noble birth to recommend him. He is a man of more than ordinary culture and refinement, and his outward seeming is all that it should be; his manners, Miss Roosevelt would say, are those of a prince; you know Adeline is given to gushing, in her weak little way—but princes sometimes have very bad manners indeed, and Mr. Jermyn's manners are perfect. I find no flaw in them. And I am credited with being fastidious. He is all that the prince, *my* prince, should be, lacking no gift or grace that a prince should possess. So much dignity, so much reserve, so much strength of intellect, such an air of—I was about to say command, but it is not that, he has not the *air* of command, but he possesses the qualities that call forth instinctive compliance—he has a commanding presence without the air.

"He left his home and country because of a misunderstanding with his father who desired to mate him with the daughter, the *only* child, of a nobleman whose estate adjoined that of Sir Ralph Jermyn. He refused the alliance, having no affection for the lady, and came here,

a voluntary exile. He does not desire to return to England, and will not do so unless (there *is* such a possibility) he is called to take up his father's duties with his father's title, some day.

"I had thought to take the important step, that changes my destiny perhaps, amid the old scenes, in Philadelphia, but Mrs. Baring is so good as to wish me to be married (how strange that looks) here at *The Hills*. Mr. Jermyn, too, desires it. He has, he says, a *sentiment* about it, and has besought me so *earnestly* to remain here that I have yielded—reluctantly, I must admit.

"Can you delay your sailing a little? Will you come to us here? When once you have crossed the ocean it may be long years before we meet, and I want you to see *him*.

"I realize that this is not a calmly composed or well-written letter; I am not quite my usual calm self; so let me end it here. When I have received your reply I may be able to write more coherently, more at my ease. Until then I am,

"Your friend as of old,

"ELLEN A. JERNYNGHAM."

*Miss Grace Roosevelt to her confidante in Philadelphia.*

"MY OWN DEAREST MAUD:

"I am horribly disappointed, and completely out of humor. Just think of having to stay here another month 'to watch the ghost of the summer,' as Lill Sunderland says, and all on account of Ellen Jernyngham.

"She is going to be married *at last*. To be married *here* at Aunt Jake's. And we must all be made martyrs because of it. Adeline is as delighted as if she were going to be married herself; you know she always *did* hold



Ellen up as a pattern of perfection, and she thinks *him*—the man in the case—perfection too. My dear, did you ever *see* a perfect man? I am sure you never did; there can't be many of them, so I am going to describe this one to you: Face, pale and blonde and regular, and expressionless; eyes pale blue, that look over you and around you, and sometimes through you, but never laugh or smile or twinkle—I would not dare affirm that they even *wink*; hands and feet exceedingly 'aristocratic,' figure, medium in height, slender, graceful, incapable of taking an awkward attitude—so much at ease everywhere and under all circumstances that it becomes exasperating to watch him; perfectly fitting clothes in perfect taste; a quiet that Ad. declares to be 'splendid repose,' I call it calm superiority; a low, slow, soft voice that always says the right thing in the right way; a slow smile that *never*, as I said before, creeps up to the eyes, his nearest approach to a laugh being a slight agitation of the lips accompanied by a soft sound that dies away quickly and makes you feel that to laugh an honest, natural, full-grown laugh would be a sin. This is the bridegroom elect, Mr. Edward Poinsett Jermyn; now let me add that he is an Englishman, the son of Lord somebody, and that he once refused, *refused!* the hand of a titled English woman—I suppose it was leap year—and then, tell me, could we—could any honest American—endure more? And yet we must all remain and be victimized, because Ellen must go off in a blaze of glory with seven bridesmaids, viz: the Baring girls, the Sunderlands, Rene Brian, of whom I have written you, Ad.—and myself. Ellen and Aunt Jake are to go to the city to shop, and we are to remain here to keep up a sort of festive accompaniment to the wedding preparations and the billing and cooing of the happy pair.

"We have had a very jolly summer—how Adeline hates that word! You know how much I like the Brians. Charlie is just the opposite of Mr. Jermyn in manner, and better-looking, to my notion—only another drawback to the general pleasure—he and Lotta are becoming a little too serious and absorbed in each other. One pair of lovers is barely endurable, in a party like ours *two* pair, although they are so different, are too much for human nature.

"I sometimes wish for poor cousin Kenneth—I *will* call him cousin although he is not exactly that. We never dare mention him in Aunt Jake's presence, but she little guesses how much we talk of him and know of his whereabouts. He writes to Lotta occasionally and to Rene Brian *regularly*. Aunt Jake dislikes Rene, in fact, her last quarrel with Ken dated from an attempt on her part to 'put down' Rene. But since Lin and Lotta have taken her up and stand by her so stanchly, Aunt Jake is outwardly courteous and Ellen Jernyngham has asked her to be one of the brides-maids although I happen to *know* that Ellen has no especial love for Rene; I can not say so much for Mr. Jermyn, (do you notice the similarity of names, Jermyn, Jernyngham? I am *sure* it will prove unlucky for one,) Mr. Jermyn certainly admires Rene very much.

"There—Lin and Lotta have invaded my sanctuary; for the present I must lay aside my pen—to be con—"

*From Rene Brian to Kenneth Baring at New Orleans.*

"MY DEAR FRIEND:—Your last letter pleased me; I am glad to think of you as so self-reliant, so content, so equal to the emergencies that have arisen in your pathway, and I am glad that you have developed so much philosophy—you will say no doubt that you always possessed it—but if so I must beg to remind you that it

was not sufficient to keep you under the same roof with the lady you are so polite as to term a 'mistaken gentle woman.' Courage, Ken; your father, I am sure, thinks of you very kindly; and after all you were a trifle at fault. The a-forementioned gentlewoman, by the by, has been of late unusually courteous to me—rather, she has been courteous where it was her custom to ignore my existence.

"Undoubtedly Lotta has gossiped to you of the doings at the Hills and the wedding in prospective. So I need say nothing of that, especially as I utterly fail in getting up an enthusiasm over the high contracting parties. In fact, and in spite of *my* philosophy, I rather dislike one of them, with, I must confess, no good and sufficient reason for so doing.

"It will all be over soon, and we shall have settled back into our old dull comfortable routine, while you plod steadily on toward manly independence. Honestly, Ken this cutting loose from your father's bank-account is not, in my opinion, the greatest of your misdeeds; a man's best qualities must come out when he stands alone to face the world, and you, I am sure, have the courage that in the end must conquer. How I am preaching! It all comes of burrowing among high-flown editorials, and hatching pretty sentences for the local column—alas! that same local column—awaits me at this moment. Adieu, for the time; accept my congratulations for your successful beginning; my best wishes for those future successes which I predict for you, and for your health and happiness now and always.

"Your Friend,

RENE BRIAN.

The marriage of the heiress and the aristocrat was the first and most interesting topic in Roseville, from the day when the affair first became known until the day of its consummation.



Nothing else could equal it in interest—not even the disappearance of Bertha Warham from her home in a neighboring town, followed as it was by the murder of her step-mother. Roseville heard all this, and it was rumored too that detectives, in search of information, were in her very midst; even this proved less interesting to the admirers of the "English aristocrat" than the news afloat about this time, that said aristocrat was the victim of "a slight indisposition" which rendered him invisible for a number of days.

In spite of the fact that it was to have been, to quote the bride elect, "a quiet affair," and to quote the bridegroom elect, "a simple ceremony," Mrs. Baring had skimmed the cream of Roseville with a discreet hand and a limited quantity of genuine Philadelphia cream, richer of course, and thicker and yellower, but lacking perhaps the freshness of the Roseville article, gave just the right flavor to the occasion.

Mrs. Brace and Mrs. Allsop were not of the cream, but they discussed the event with indignant enthusiasm, seated in Mr. Jermyn's late sitting-room, vacated by him only that morning.

"One would a-thought," said Mrs. Allsop, looking resentful in behalf of her friend, "that they'd a' invited you, Brace."

"It's my belief," returned the landlady with an indignant sniff, "that if *he'd* a' had the sayin', I'd a' *been* invited. Mrs. Allsop, if I'd a' done that man a thousand-dollar favor, over an' agin, instead of just lookin' into his rooms an' takin' care o' his things, as, to be sure, it was only my business to do, he couldn't a' been politer than he always was, nor thankfuller than he was this very mornin'."

"La!" said Mrs. Allsop, "you don't say so."

"Yes I *do*; when I come in here with my broom an'

dust-rag this mornin' he steps out of his bedroom already drest for the surremony, an' I tell you he looked *splendid*, an' says he as smilin' as could be, 'Mrs. Brace, Ma'm, I feel deeply grateful to you.' 'My!' says I, 'Mr. Jerming what *have* I done?' 'You have done;' says he 'what few women, I may say no woman, unless, it may be, another *like yourself* could have done for me,' an' then he actually stopped an' laffed the biggest laff I ever seen him give.' 'You've taken a almost motherly interest in me,' he says 'you have made me feel very comfortable here' says he; 'whenever I think of Roseville I shall think of you,' Ma'am, and here is a small proof of my regard.'

"Then he put a envelope into my hand right along with the dust-rag an' went back inter his bedroom an' shut the door."

"Umm," said Mrs. Allsop.

"I didn't want to open the envelope *there*" ran on Mrs. Brace, "so I jist scooted over to my bedroom an' shut myself in." Here she paused and looked at Mrs. Allsop.

"Well!" said that lady sharply.

"*What* do you suppose was in that envelope, now?"

"Umph! His fotygraff."

"No *ma'am!*"

"Goodness me! I can't guess;" Mrs. Allsop was growing frigid.

"It was a bran new *fifty-dollar* bill."

Mrs. Allsop was frozen. Had they not been equals hitherto, joint holders of a stock secret and now—Mrs. Allsop aroused herself.

"I wonder what Brace'll say to *that*."

"*Brace!*" Mrs. B— gave her head a defiant toss. "He hadn't better say *anything*. That fifty dollars is a going into a bran new silk dress, *sa-age* green."

"Well," said Mrs. Allsop rising, and tightening her bon-

net strings, "I must be a' goin'. No, thanky, I *can't* stay to tea. Hope ye may enjoy yer sage green silk, Mrs. Brace—sage green's a *very* good color. But I can tell ye *this*, I don't take no stock in yer Mister Englishman; an' there won't no good come of this highfalutin' wedding, *you'll* see."

"The cheeky old thing!" she muttered when she had reached the street, "to go an' take that *bill*. humph! *she'll* see!"

And before sunset the village dressmaker, across whose threshold many a secret had passed to lose its identity forever more, was aware of the beginning and the end. The only portions not yet generally known to Roseville of the story of the letter, and the fifty-dollar bill. And in the sanctity of the dressmaker's small parlor, these secrets were swallowed at a gulp by "I heard," and "They say."

"I'm glad its over," sighed Rene Brian when, after a day of feasting and congratulations, flowers, music, pomp and flutter, with five minutes of wedding ceremony to give it flavor, she stood at last in her own little sitting-room, pulling at a slightly soiled glove, and glancing ruefully at her brother.

"I thought women always enjoyed a wedding."

"You never thought a thing so silly, Charl' Brian; *such* a wedding too."

"What went wrong—pretty girls, lovely dresses, elegant bride, distinguished bridegroom—"

"Mr. Brian, if you are arranging a pretty paragraph for the *Roseville News*, permit me to retire."

"Don't go, Rene," his tone growing more serious, "I want you to ex—to tell me something. No, I want to tell you something."



"Oh! How very singular." Rene sat down in a low rocker.

"It was only about a picture, sis; the only unpleasant picture that I saw to-day."

Reine quoted something under her breath, of which he could only catch the words, "cupid" and "stupid."

"I was standing at one of the drawing-room windows talking with Lotta Baring," he began.

"How singular!" interpolated his sister.

"Be quiet, miss! I was standing with my back to the light; Lotta sat on a low seat facing me."

"How interesting!" sighed Rene.

"As we talked I could look across the drawing-room, over her head. It was after the—"

"Marriage rite?" suggested Rene.

"After that and the—a breakfast."

"Why didn't you say 'Feast of reason,' you know you wanted to."

"Wait, miss; I could look for a moment, from my window, straight across to another window, and there saw my picture."

He paused for the usual jibe, but it did not come.

"It consisted of three figures," he resumed; "one, that of a young woman with a very icy look upon her face. The second, the figure of a man blonde and handsome. He was leaning toward the icy young woman with what looked like appeal in his eyes, and he held out his hand; his attention for the moment was concentrated upon the icy girl. In response to something the man said, the icy girl put her icy fingers in his for half a second, seeming to grow more icy in the act. Then the third figure made a sudden movement; it was a splendid figure—all sheeny satin, and silky lace, and clinging veil. It had seemed to be looking from the window, a little aloof from the other two. But it leaned forward suddenly and bent

a look, such a black, somber, angry look upon the appealing man, and the icy girl. Then other figures came between the picture and me."

"If I were you," said Rene without lifting her eyes, "for the sake of propriety, I would call that scene you have just described a pantomime—not a picture."

"I will call it anything you like, my sister," he said, very seriously now, "if you will tell me what the handsome man said to the icy girl; and what the woman in bridal array said to them both."

"I will *not* tell!" she cried springing up suddenly; "and you need not ask it, why must I be perpetually annoyed about that man? I *hate* him! I am glad he is gone? I'm glad they are *both* gone! and I hope I will never, *never*, NEVER see their faces again!" and with flashing eyes and flushed cheeks Rene Brian hastened from the room.

"E. Percy Jermyn and his bride drove away from "The Hills" in Jacob Baring's costly barouche, followed by a chorus of laughing adieus, a shower of rice, and half a dozen dainty white slippers.

The bride was calm and very stately, but the bridegroom unbent for once, and sent his smiles and jests and debonair adieus back to the merry groups upon piazza and lawn, as they rolled down the tree-lined slope and out of the gates.

But when those gates had closed behind them, he turned to the lady beside him and dropped his airy tone. "Ellen, my dear, I dare say *you* did not forget your milliner or costumer, and have nothing now to ask from either. But I—alas!" he put his hand to his breast and from an inner pocket drew two letters half-way, letting her see the names merely, then thrusting them back and dropping the hand lightly upon her own, which she had seemed about to extend. "We are to spend only two

days in Chicago, and yet, so careless am I, I neglected to order from hatter and clothier the bare necessities of life. Therefore, permit me to order George to drive past the postoffice and let me post my two letters so that they may go promptly. We don't care to be detained in that city of push and crudity, because of a belated *chapeau*, do we?"

"Can you not give the letters to George and let him—"

"My *dear!*" He drew out the two letters, which were sealed and addressed, and laid them in her lap with a smile, "would you have the name of my tailor and hatter made known to all Roseville. George has curiosity for two and a nimble tongue."

She glanced at the envelopes and read upon one the name of a famous dealer in gentleman's apparel, upon the other, "Alexander Primrose, Hatter," and smiled as he gathered them up and told the coachman to stop.

A moment later he stood at the little office window.

"Some postage-stamps if you please," he said and while the man turned to supply his want, Mr. Jermyn's deft fingers tore off the two envelopes, bearing the names of draper and hatter, and thrusting their fragments into an outer pocket of his light top coat, held in his hand two letters the wrappers a trifle smaller than those just cast off, and differently addressed. On one was inscribed to the "Mrs. Sarah Blake, Seamstress," and this envelope contained a brief note running thus:

"MADAM.—I shall be in Chicago to-morrow and will call for the garments at 6:30 P. M. Please be *prompt*.

"E. P. J."

The other envelope bore the name and address of the *chief of police*.



## CHAPTER XXXI

### IN CONSULTATION

"When doctors disagree," the result is not necessarily disastrous to the subject of the argument; indeed, it has happened that while "isms and opathies" battered each other's heads, fugratively of course, nature, before ignored and pushed to the wall, has found time to assert herself, and the victim of the "opathies and isms" has escaped with his life.

When detectives disagree, the result is not so happy. For the innocent are hunted and persecuted equally with the guilty, and it has happened that the wrong was never righted; that through many fingers the guilty have escaped, and the innocent suffered ignominy, imprisonment; yes—to our everlasting shame and humiliation—even death.

While Rufus Carnes, ignorant of all that was transpiring, was recovering from his hurts, and coming back to strength and health, the "doctors" were disagreeing, and bringing about a state of affairs that rendered the Warham mystery a double mystery, and worse—made of it, the strangest complication that ever puzzled the heads of detectives or figured in the annals of crime.

On the seventh day of his imprisonment, Carnes was sitting in an easy-chair, his head still bandaged, talking with Captain B—, the chief of police.

The windows were open and a mild breeze was rustling softly among a pile of newspapers open and lying

loosely upon the table between them. The eyes of the invalid were bright and his look animated.

He had been reading through the mass of papers before him the printed accounts of what had become known as the "Warham Murder Mystery," and he had been listening to the little, not exploited by the press, which Captain B—. could tell him. Through it all he had been very silent, very thoughtful.

"It's a new thing for His Honor to do," said Carnes, after a pause in the conversation. "I should very much like to forecast what it will lead to."

"It will lead," said the captain with a grin, to *one* result; the one he aims at. Several thousand of our voting citizens will say: Great is the Mayor of our city who hunts down crime with the city pocket-book and keeps the city's police to look after the city's safety."

"The city, fudge! A blind man can see his motive in setting 'Sharp's Agency' upon this case at the city's expense; and it was a neat thing to do too *at this time*. There's been a deal of fault found with our loose way of dealing with crime and criminals here. His Honor has done a neat thing for himself; it won't cost him a cent and it'll be a bonanza for some of Sharp's men—but—"

"Carnes," broke in Captain B—, "I heard this morning that Sharp had made an effort to get you back."

"Umph!"

The captain leaned across the table and looked him squarely in the face. "Is that true?" he asked.

"Umph!" grunted Carnes again. "Why do you want to know?"

"Simply because if you are going back to Sharp I want to leave unsaid what otherwise I intend to say to you."

"Captain," asked Carnes abruptly, "do you intend to

let Sharp and his men and his Honor the Mayor do all the running?"

"Carnes," said Captain B—, with a very good imitation of the detective's manner, "do *you* intend to help Sharp & Co., or do you not?"

"Well—no, I don't."

"But they have applied to you?"

"Yes."

"And you told them—"

"That I had another case in hand."

"Is that true?"

"Yes."

The captain broke into a laugh.

"You know, Carnes," he said, slowly, "**that I am** utterly ignorant concerning your dealings with that woman?"

Carnes nodded.

"When I came home, and learned that she was dead—murdered—I was puzzled; but I made up my mind not to reveal the little that I knew, until I had learned more about her, and the manner of her death, and had seen you. It couldn't do much good to make public the fact that I had seen the woman, and knew what brought her to the city."

Carnes started as if struck with some sudden thought, and then said quietly, "That's so."

"And it might complicate matters very much."

"I should think so," muttered Carnes.

"So I have kept silent, and no one, save yourself, knows that she applied to me for aid, and that I turned her over to you. But you must see that I feel a certain responsibility. Look at it! Here is a woman, a stranger in the city; she comes to me for aid. Comes to the office of the chief of police. I turn her over to *you*—a detective. At an unfortunate time, when you are dis-



abled and I absent, she is found dead in an alley; Carnes, it's a thing that we wouldn't care to see in the newspapers."

"Confound the newspapers!"

"Amen to that. As I have said, no one knows that the woman, Lucretia Warham, was, in a manner, under my protection and yours. It would serve no good purpose to make it public. But my knowledge imposes a duty upon me. His Honor and Sharp may do their utmost, and I wish them success. As for me, I will use every dollar and every man I can command, if necessary. I will leave nothing undone, no stone unturned, to find the murderer of Miss. Warham."

"Amen, and amen!" said Rufus Carnes solemnly. "I'm with you there."

"Does that mean you will join me?"

"No."

There was a moment of silence between them and then the captain said:

"I can't understand you, Carnes, but my confidence in you is unlimited. So I say again, I am going into this business with all my might, and I am going to begin by telling you all that I have learned since I came back. It seems that Colton of Colton & Rouke, bankers, is the friend in some degree of Mrs. Warham's husband—"

Carnes made a quick movement and opened his lips to speak, then checked himself, and as the captain paused said impatiently:

"Go on—go on!"

"When Colton saw the description of the murdered woman, and learned that she had been identified as one Mrs. Warham, he went straight to the morgue, claimed the body as agent for John Warham, the husband, and took full charge of affairs. He telegraphed for instruc-

tions, and was requested to act for Mr. Warham. The next day he called at my office; as you know, I was not there."

"Umph! Go on."

"Next day he came again. I had not been back three hours. He told me, what I already knew, that Mrs. Warham came to this city to search for her missing step-daughter. He had just received a letter written by a young man whom he had sent to act as escort, with the body of the murdered woman. He also told me that nearly two weeks ago, he had received a letter from John Warham asking him to send at once an able detective, but giving no hint as to the nature of the service he required. 'By a fortunate accident,' I am quoting his words, 'he became aware that very day, that a keen young fellow, who had, upon occasion, done one of his friends great service, was at leisure, and in the city. He had secured the services of this keen young person and sent him in to the country, to place himself at Mr. Warham's disposal.' "

"Yes, yes!" ejaculated Carnes impatiently.

"Well, the upshot of the matter was just this: The old man, for he is an old man, is too feeble to come in person, and he has appointed this 'keen young fellow,' sent him by Colton, his agent, giving him authority to draw upon Colton for funds, and to act in the matter as his keen young judgment shall dictate. Mr. Colton's business was to tell me these things and to ask me to co-operate with Mr. Warham's chosen agent, and assist him to the extent of my power. Mr. Colton was not aware, until I enlightened him, that Sharp & Co. and His Honor were already in the field."

"Well?" queried Carnes with growing interest.

"Colton seems to look upon his Honor's latest bid for popularity very much as you and I do, and he did

not express unlimited confidence in Sharp and his minions. He's a reticent old fellow and there's a good deal of starch in him, but he don't leave you at a loss to understand his meaning. He'll rest *his* case in the hands of the 'keen,' young fellow, and the city police."

"I suppose," said Carnes giving the bandage about his temples a nervous twitch, "you are aware that you haven't named this keen chap of Colton's selection?"

"His name," said Capain B—— his face relaxing in a broad smile, his name is—a—Stanhope—*Richard Stanhope!*"

"I knew it," cried Carnes excitedly. "I knew it. We couldn't *ask* for a better thing!"

"I don't just see your drift," said Captain B—, wrinkling his brows and scanning his friends face curiously. "You say *we*—and yet—"

Carnes got up and walked across the room, turned, came back, and resumed his seat, laughing a short nervous laugh and pulling again at his bandages.

"I'll tell you," he said with growing animation. "Or—rather, I'll tell you *my* experience, since I saw you last, then you'll understand me—perhaps."

"Wait," said captain B—, "let me say my say out first. Colton has contrived to keep his name out of the newspapers, and owing to the commendable shrewdness and forethought of the clerk of the Avenue House, the reporters have missed another item—which Sharp & Co., are making much of."

"What's that?"

"They have, or think they have, a clue."

"No!"

"It seems that Mrs. Warham kept her business very close; they did not so much as guess at it at the Avenue. But, she had a visitor."

"Why—of course!" Carnes stopped suddenly and stared at his *vis a vis*.



"On two successive afternoons," went on the chief of police, "she received a visitor, a middle-aged dapper business-like fellow, who remained upon each occasion an hour or more."

Carnes began to grin.

"This person, it seems was an unknown, and some of the people at the Avenue House now recall several things that smack of mystery. This man sent up no name to the lady; he came and went quietly, and on both occasions, seemed to be expected. One of the woman servants remembers that after the first interview with this stranger, the lady seemed annoyed and anxious, and after the *second* visit she seemed agitated and nervous. This man *can not be found*."

"Can't he?" said Carnes with a queer intonation.

"He can't be found," looking at him fixedly. "But Sharp & Co., are looking for him. They have jumped at the bait; they think the dapper, middle-aged unknown is the guilty man."

Rufus Carnes threw back his head and indulged in a roar of laughter.

"Good!" he cried, bringing down the palm of his hand upon the table between them. "Let them continue to think so."

"So," said Captain B— slowly, "it is as I suspected."

"What did you suspect?"

"That you could tell who this strange visitor was, and where to find him."

"Who he *was*!" said Carnes. "You have used the right word. He *was*, but is not. He will never be seen again; make yourself comfortable, Cap. Try a cigar. I'll tell you all about it."

And he did.

Graphically; yet in detail, he went over the ground, omitting nothing.

Martin and the advertisements; Mrs. Warham's strangely told stories; Joseph Larsen and his peculiar operations; Patsy and his discoveries; Barney O'Calahan, and his plans; the decoy letter designed to bring Mrs. Warham and Larsen face to face; his visit to the captain's office, and the letter of dismissal there received, all passed in review.

When all was told, Captain B— looked grave.

"Carnes," he said slowly, "this will be a complicated case."

"It will unravel itself," said the detective grimly, "once I get my hand on the throat of Mr. Joseph Larsen!"

Captain B— arose and stood before him.

"So you think he is the murderer!" he said slowly.

"I *know* he is the murderer, and I'll find him or die trying!"

"It looks as if you were right," said Captain B— consulting his watch and beginning to move about the room, like a man suddenly grown restless.

"At any rate it's our first business to find this fellow. Heavens! how unfortunate that he should have so much the start of us!"

Carnes arose and began in his turn to be restless. He approached the captain and seemed about to speak, then closed his lips and walked to the nearest window. "What do you intend to do first?" he asked without turning his head.

"Start the machinery, at all points. There's enough to do! and the way to begin is to *begin*. Where's that boy of yours."

"That's what I want to know; if Patsy can't help us forward it is because something has happened him. I set him upon Larsen, and he is not easily shaken off."

"He's been at the office, and he's been here several times. They wouldn't let him come up."

"Eh!" Carnes turned sharply; strode across the room, and pushed the bell-spring viciously. It brought a boy in hot haste

"I want to see the clerk," said Carnes savagely, "send him up quick."

In a very few moments the clerk appeared, smiling, yet somewhat apprehensive.

"When was that boy of mine here last, Leech?" asked the detective.

"The boy—a red-head?"

"Of course," impatiently.

"He's in the office now—"

"What!"

"Says he will stay there until we let him come up."

"By— — —!" Carnes' impatience vented itself in profanity. "You can't send him up too quick, do you hear! Wait, how often has he been here?"

"Every day since you were hurt, he—"

"Send him up! *send him up—quick!*" he emphasized his words, quite unnecessarily, by an outward movement of the hands, and still further by slamming the door in the young man's face.

"Confound these doctors!" growled Carnes going back to his chair. "They might have let that boy see me."

The flush upon his face died out; his hands, resting upon the arms of the invalid's chair, began to tremble.

The chief eyed him anxiously.

"You're overdoing, old man," he said resuming his seat opposite Carnes. "You'll bring yourself down again."

"No I *wont!* But I'll be obliged if you'll hand me that bottle and glass. Wine? no—it's some infernal bitters. Thank you, ah! *come in.*" It was Patsy who entered, smiling broadly, yet ready to cry.

"Well, my boy," said Carnes cheerfully, "how are you? Shake! There," giving the lad's hand a hearty grip, "make



your bow to Captain B—. He knows all about us, and bring up your chair. You must give an account of yourself."

Patsy's face clouded. He glanced furtively at the captain, then appealingly at Carnes. The blood mounted to his temples and tears gathered in his eyes. He dropped his chin upon his breast and played uneasily with his battered cap.

"If—if you please, boss," he faltered, "I— I'd rather tell you alone *first*. —I—I—*can't* tell anybody else!"

Carnes and the captain exchanged glances. Then the latter said:

"Let him have his way, Carnes. I'm pressed for time just now. Hear his report; I'll look in again this evening." Then he turned to the boy. "Patsy," he said kindly, "you are a fine little fellow. I've heard about you and want to know you better. Tell your story, my man. I'll take myself off," and nodding to Carnes, and giving the boy's head a friendly pat, he turned to go.

"Stop," called Carnes, half rising then sinking back again. "Do you know what was done with her luggage?"

"Eh?"

"The woman's trunk, these," glancing toward the newspapers, "say that it was left at the 'Avenue'— what became of it?"

"Oh! yes, Colton took charge of it; it was examined I think, before the inquest, then formally secured and sent with the body."

"Umph! I wonder if Sharp had a chance at it!"

The captain glanced at the boy, and then said after a momentary hesitation:

"I think *not*—I neglected to mention—ahem—that two of his men left the city yesterday."

"Ah!" said Carnes. "Thank you." When the door had closed behind the captain, Carnes swept the pile of

newspapers from the table beside him to the floor, and drēw up his chair.

"Pat," he said briskly, "go to my desk and bring me pencil and paper."

The boy obeyed him mutely, and then sat opposite, looking curiously at the bandaged head and the muscular hands whitened by illness and thinned by pain. With the exit of the chief of police his anxiety had vanished, and he now sat patiently attentive while Carnes penciled this message:

"RICHARD STANHOPE UPTON."

*"Contrive to get a picture in a red velvet case, from Mrs. W—'s trunk. Young man with dark face, square jaw and wide mouth. Send or bring it. Don't let it fall to Sharp & Co.*

"CARNES."

Having written this he picked up one of the papers from the floor, to assure himself that he had remembered the name of the little town where Mr. Colton had sent the "keen" young detective: The home of missing Bertha Warham and her murdered step-mother.

"Pat", he said, while the pencil moved rapidly across the bottom of the sheet, "before we settle to business, run to the telegraph-office with this, give it to Bowen, mind, and here," searching his pockets for a piece of money, "pay it. Then hurry back."

When the boy had gone, Carnes walked to a dressing-case between two windows and surveyed his face in the glass. He looked tired and worn.

"I'm growing old," he said musingly, "I look it. A few thumps and the loss of a little blood have brought me to this."

He sighed and turned from the mirror. His hands were shaking, his limbs trembled. He crossed the room and

threw himself heavily upon a couch at the foot of the bed.

"I can't understand myself," he muttered. "I never saw Bertha Warham, and I detested her step mother, and yet I feel toward that fellow Larsen a rooted and abiding hatred—a hatred born of instinct—I can't understand it."



## CHAPTER XXXII

### HOW PATSY "BACKSLID"

"Now, Pat," said Carnes, when the boy came breathlessly back, and stood beside the couch upon which he lay, "drag up your chair, and let's hear what you have to say. But first lock the door, and bring me that blanket. There, that's better. Confound it! I'm as chilled and feeble as an old woman."

He drew the blanket about his shoulders, and arranged the pillows underneath his head, with sundry shakes and punches, not especially indicative of his feeble condition; and when Patsy had placed himself near him, sitting apprehensively upon the edge of his chair as if not quite certain of his ability to retain his position, he said:

"Now, Pat. Out with it. What have you done with our friend?"

Patsy's face became gloomy, seeing which Carnes said:

"You've had bad luck, I see. Out with it, my boy. We can't always succeed."

He was markedly curt and abrupt with his equals in years and knowledge, but to this homeless, almost friendless gamin, and such as he, Rufus Carnes turned, always, his softer side, seldom showing impatience, and tempering his *brusquerie* with good humor.

Patsy's face reddened, and he fidgeted on his chair.

"Cap'n," he said ruefully, "I—I've lost him;" he hung his head and two big tears stood in his eyes.

Carnes bit his lip, then said quietly:

"Tell me about it, Pat."

"When I seen ye go out o' the Galloway that mornin' you know—"

"The morning I got this, you mean?" Carnes laid his hand upon the bandage about his head.

"Yes. That mornin', I was on hand as right as could be. You hadn't been gone long before his nibs was doin' the old racket, an' me at his heels. He hadn't only jest begun fairly, though, afore somethin' turned up that switched him off the track. He had jest stopped and begun a talkin' to one o' them blessed hackmen o' his, when a woman come walkin' along, slow like, as if she didn't much care which way she went. She was a big woman with a good many fixins' on—what's the matter, Cap'n?"

Carnes had raised himself suddenly and resting the weight of his body upon his right hand was gazing fixedly at the boy. He now dropped back upon his pillow, recalled to himself by the question, a look of vexation crossing his face.

"Nothing, Pat," he said, "only I'm growing as excitable as a girl; if I don't get out of this hole soon, I'll be in genuine hysterics. Go on—about the woman."

"She had a veil all over her face," resumed Patsy, "an' I didn't git no chance to see it. But I had plenty of time to notice her togs, for she stopped short, close to his nibs—"

"Pat," said Carnes interrupting and giving his unoffending pillow a vigorous punch, "this isn't just the time for a lecture on slang. And I'm not just the chap to deliver it. I don't object to some bits of slang—use them myself in fact, but I *do* detest that phrase you use. 'His *nibs*!'—hideous! Call the fellow anything you like, Pat, call him the Devil, but *don't* call him, nor any one 'his *nibs*.'"

Concerning his use or abuse of language, Patsy was not sensitive; so he grinned, said "all right, Cap'n," and made another attempt.

"O—the feller was so busy a-talkin' to cabby that he didn't see her, an' she stood there a minit, an' then pulled up her veil and said 'Joe,' so loud I could hear it plain—"

"I thought you didn't see her face, Pat," broke in Carnes.

"I didn't!" retorted the boy showing a little temper. "I was square behind her, an' she jest jerked the thing off her face for a minit an' there let it go back ag'in."

"Oh!" murmured Carnes. "Go on, Pat, I wanted to catch you napping, but I see you know what you're talking about."

Patsy fixed his eye somewhat severely upon the face of his patron and said:

"If you had chased them two as long as I did, and as fur, them a-ridin' an' you on foot, I reckon you'd be apt to know somethin' about it yourself."

"That's so, Pat," said Carnes soothingly. "Go on, that's a good fellow; give us particulars. I won't interrupt again."

Patsy made a last effort to appear unappeased. He was used to these tilts with his eccentric task-master, and knew that he had come off victor for the time. So he resumed his narrative gravely:

"When she said 'Joe,' in a kind of sharp, anxious way, as if she felt most afraid of him, he turned around quick as a cat, lookin' scairt like. When he seen who it was, he got awful black an' ugly in the face. He's a kind o' loggy, slow-movin' feller, but he jest showed his wrong side *then* in a minit. He said somethin' in her ear, kind o' sharp and hiss'n', and then said somethin' to the cabby. The next minit he was bundlin' her in-



ter the carriage an' scramblin' in after her, an' away they went."

He paused now and waited for comment, but none came.

Carnes was looking at him intently, his face revealing nothing of his thoughts.

"I chased that carriage," said Patsy impressively, "till I couldn't run no more. It was right in the heat o' the mornin', and I like to got nabbed more nor once by the bobs as I raced past. A confounded little nig with papers set up a 'stop thief' howl; I just took time to hit him one left-hander and on I scooted. Byme by, they began to go slower, and I was mighty glad of it; I couldn't a' stood much more; I'd begun to wonder, as I was runnin', if the feller wasn't forgettin' his business; but pretty soon after the cabby slowed up; he begun to work round back toward the place he started from, an' then he stopped an' the woman an' our man got out. Cabby drove away, an' the man an' woman walked along talkin' pretty earnest, but mighty careful not to talk loud. All at once they stopped at a corner, and after a little more talk the man went one way and she went another, only after he'd started off she turned around and looked after him as if she had forgot somethin' or didn't want him to go—"

"Pat," said Carnes suddenly, "this corner where they separated, was it far from the Avenue House? You know the place don't you?"

"I know it well enough." Patsy began to look troubled. "The corner where our man left her was in plain sight of the Avenue House, two blocks away."

"Go on, Pat."

"When I seen her start, she went right toward the Avenue. I trotted after our man. He was walkin' lively an' he brought up at the 'Owl' office. He got

something from the chap at the winder, and he was in hot haste to read it; I had got near enough to see his hand shake when he stopped right outside the door and tore the letter open. All at once he turned pale as any spook, an' give a kind of jump as if somethin' bit him. Then he started off, lookin' kind a wild like, walkin' fast and then slackin' and goin' slow. He didn't seem to know where to go at first; he'd walk one way an' then he'd turn an' walk another; byme by he whirled round and walked back to the Galloway, an' then I got time to take a breath—"

"Take a breath now, Pat, and then tell me as nearly as you can what time it was when the man and woman parted at the corner."

"It was early," said the boy after a moment's thought. Not more than half-past ten, I should say."

"Umph," muttered Carnes; "that explains it."

"Hu'h!"

"I was talking to myself, Pat; don't mind me. What did the fellow do next?"

"Eat his dinner I reckon," grinned Patsy. "Anyway 'twas time. He didn't show outside for a good while; I chanced a little on it anyway, an' got a snack, an' my blackin' kit. My feet was swelled with runnin' and I got off my shoes and give 'em a rest. I swapped tops with another boy that I knew first-rate, an' got a cap that I could pull clear down to the back of my neck, then I turned my coat wrong side out; I thought I might be gitten' kind o' conspicuous round that quarter. then I rubbed some dust onto my face. After quite a long rest, the feller came out from the Galloway, an' I guess *he* begun to feel conspicuous too, for he was buttoned up in a long-tailed brown duster an' had a different hat onto his head. This time he struck straight out for the Avenue House, but instead of goin' in, he

crossed over an' walked up an' down on t'other side of the street, lookin' up at the winders. Pretty soon out come the woman agin with her veil over her face, and they met at the corner and walked away slow, an' talkin' pretty fast. They didn't go fur but seemed to agree upon somethin'. Then she went back to her hotel, an' he went to his'n. Then I made tracks fer here, an' you was lyin' there lookin' as good as dead, an' they wouldn't let me in."

His face clouded at the remembrance, and Carnes put out a hand and patted his knee gently.

"Poor old Pat," he said soothingly; "they didn't know that you were my right-hand man."

The boy smiled and drew his hand across his eyes.

"You better believe I was bothered," he went on. "But I knew you was on the square with Captain B—, so I went to his quarters; but he was gone too. Then I was puzzled worse than ever, but I says, to myself, Patsy, you've got to hold the fort, an' you'd better begin."

Here Patsy paused and looked ruefully down at the carpet, but Carnes was now too anxious and too deeply interested to interrupt.

Patsy's eyes traveled from the carpet to a chair, from the chair to the table, then to the ceiling, and finally Carnes said:

"You decided to hold the fort, eh? I didn't know that you were acquainted with Mr. Sankey. Did you—a—hold the fort Pat?"

"No," said the boy dropping his gaze from the ceiling to the face of his interlocutor, "I—I *backslid*." And then he hurriedly related his adventures of the following day, telling how Larsen had gone his usual round among the hackmen, in the morning; how he had followed him, after dinner, and overheard his inquiries



about Carnes in the office below, and how at last, in spite of his efforts Larsen had escaped him, aided by the crowd, and the growing darkness, vanishing utterly from that moment.

"I've tried my best;" he concluded; "every day I've scoured the streets, I've watched the hackmen, and the folks at the stalls. He ain't never been near none of 'em. I've hung about the theaters and hotels, and depots, but it's goin' to take more than *me* to find *him*—specially now."

"Why *now*. Patsy."

The boy leaned forward and spoke in a half-whisper:

"The next day," he said, I was passin' by the morgue; there was a crowd there a-lookin' at a dead woman as they'd jest found in some alley—an' I went in an' took a look with the rest. I didn't know her face but I was sure I had seen the clothes. 'Twas the same thing, all ruffy an' kind o' green, the color of scum on the puddles down in the low river streets. I didn't dare say a word, but I hung round the Avenue House till I made out she was'nt there—"

"Who, Pat?"

"Why her, that woman that met our feller, and went off in the carriage with him. And then the next day it came out that she were the woman that had been stopping at the Avenue, an' her name an' all. Ain't ye heard about it, Cap?"

Carnes turned upon his couch and uttered a sigh of weariness. "Yes, I've heard about it, boy. I've heard too much, and not enough. Pat, have you told anyone that you had seen this woman?"

"*Me!*" with a flash of indignation, "no *sir*. *I* ain't a fool."

"That's so, Pat. And now let me tell you this: there's going to be hot work before we find our man again, and

I depend upon you to help us out. Go to your roost, boy, and to-morrow present yourself bright and early ready for a hard day's work. Keep your mouth shut and your eyes open. Good boy!"

That night, before he slept, Rufus Carnes told Patsy's story to the chief of police and together they arranged a plan of action, which left little to be accomplished, in the line of these researches, by Messrs. Sharp & Co., and his Honor the Mayor.

They had not agreed upon all points; the chief of police was essentially practical. He theorized little, and indulged in no feats of foresight. He measured his ground carefully, set his foot down firmly, and studied his game as he stalked it.

Not so Rufus Carnes; he theorized largely, and was a firm believer in "impressions." It was unsafe to presuppose a man's actions from his characteristics, he argued. No man knows what he himself will be capable of, under given circumstances, until the circumstance has tried him. The rule of "cause and effect" was worth little when applied to human beings. The chief scoffed at some of his theories, and called them vagaries, and frowned down some of his propositions, as impracticable; but he went away at last to put into execution just what Carnes had planned. For he knew that in spite of his "theories and far fetched ideas," Carnes, when in action, was sound in judgment, quick to conceive, swift to execute, this "impression" seldom leading him astray.

Carnes pondered long, when late in the evening he found himself alone, he was beginning to feel strangely interested in the complication he was studying.

To the chief of police, the mystery presented itself in its simplest phase, viz: To find the murderer of Lucretia Warham. To Carnes it was complex, and

involved in its meshes, the fate of Bertha Warham and the mystery which began with her disappearance, and ended, if it were ended, in the death of her father's wife. It was long after midnight when Carnes, worn out with the day's fatigues, fell asleep, to dream that he stood upon a frightful eminence and looked down upon rugged rocks jutting out from among thorns and brambles, dagger-pointed and hideous, and ending in a sea of black, foam-capped waters far below, and to feel himself pushed from that dreadful height, with the sound of hoarse laughter in his ears, and the faces of Joseph Larsen and the blonde and delicate ex-convict whom he had known in prison as "No. 36", looking mockingly down upon him, as, torn and pierced by the briers and rocks, he sank beneath the black waters.



## CHAPTER XXXIII

### A MODERN INQUISITION

"The way to begin, is to begin," Carnes had said sententiously to the chief of police, and, on the following morning, the latter officer opened his batteries in this wise:

While the morning was quite fresh, a "hackman" of sinister countenance, sitting askew upon his box, yawning, and looking lazily about for a possible fare, waited, spider-like, at the curbstone in front of a huge railway station, where various roads "terminated" with much rumble and roar.

The fellow was a late bird, as well as an early one, and his wits may have been still slumbering, or less than half-awakened, when an innocent-looking person, wearing "countryfied" garments and carrying a black and shining valise, approached him timidly, and asked, quite respectfully, and in a hushed voice:—"Won't you—please be so kind as to kerry me to the court-house, to see the chief of police?"

The hackman gave the customary reply, in the customary manner, and so strong is the force of habit, he had uncoiled himself to scramble down and open the carriage-door, when the stranger began to clamber up to the box with some difficulty, owing to the black valise, which he dragged up after him.

"Ye might as well 'ave got inside," said the hackman surlily, and gathering up his reins.

"Might I?" the country-man peered down curiously. "Wal, never mind, now. Jest take me to where I can see the chief of police, quick; I—I'm awful anxious."

The driver favored him with a long, steady stare, and then whipped his horses to a rapid trot.

Arrived at the chief's head quarters, he drew up, not at the entrance, but a little below it. Two policemen were standing near the stone steps.

"There's yer place," said the driver to his fare, "up them steps, where ye see the p'licemen; ye can git down here."

"As the man began to fumble in his pockets, in search of money, to pay his fare, the two policemen sauntered toward them, carelessly. "Hurry up," said the driver, "I want to ketch that next train."

"I guess," said the country-man, beginning to clamber down, with a grin upon his face, and seeming to have forgotten his black valise, "I guess ye'd better come down, too, and come into the 'court-house' a bit. Hadn't he, boys?"

"I reckon he had," said one of the 'boys,' in blue coats, taking the horses by the bits as he spoke.

"I'm blest if he *hadn't*," said the other "boy", darting swiftly to the side of the carriage, nearest the driver. 'Will you walk into my parlor, said the—'

This ancient bit of pleasantry was drowned by a fusilade of oaths from the driver, who sprang up and clapped a hand upon his hip.

"Oh, *I've* got that," said his late fare blandly, "come down, *come down*."

This invitation, promptly repeated by the two policemen, had its effect upon the hackman—he came down, and after a short parley, and a shorter struggle, was led into the presence of the chief of police.

The prisoner was a sullen fellow, and having been

persuaded into the august presence, by the force of numbers, he bore himself with somber dignity, and condescended to no remonstrance or argument, only bestowing occasional sinister glances upon his late fare, who held in his hand the revolver he had so dextrously transferred from cabby's pocket to his own possession.

Having disposed of the preliminaries—name, age, residence, occupation, etc,—the chief leaned back in his elbow-chair, and said with grave politeness:

"I am sorry to trouble you, my friend, but I very much want to see a photograph, which you carry in your pocket; so if—"

The prisoner's dignity abated somewhat a trio of profane adjectives dropped from his lips, his hand went up to his breast, and suddenly went down again.

"I ain't got—" he began, then halted, and ended with—"I dunno what you mean!"

"I was about to say," resumed the chief, "that, our time being limited, unless you favor me with a sight of this picture without parley, I shall have you searched."

The prisoner started and looked hastily about him.

The man in the rustic toilet was smiling blandly, and moving gently toward him. The prisoner moved a pace forward.

"I don't know what ye mean, yer honor. I ain't got no pictures, so help me—"

"Take care, my friend!"

"I tell ye, ye've made a mistake—ye've got the wrong man!"

"Do you see that screen in the corner?" said the chief, sharply.

The fellow looked about him.

"Yes, yer honor."

"Just turn and face it. Halt! that's near enough. Felix."



The man, who still held the prisoner's revolver, answered, "Yes sir."

The chief nodded, and Felix moved toward the prisoner.

"Now," said the chief, with his eyes upon the screen—"Do you see him, Pat?"

"Yes sir," came a boyish voice from the sheltered corner.

"Do you know him?"

"Yes, sir." The tone very positive.

"How often have you seen him?"

"Every day for two weeks."

The prisoner let fall another oath and sprang toward the screen. But Felix and the revolver were before him.

"There'll be a hack-driver's funeral to-morrow if you don't look lively," said Felix, no longer smiling.

"Give him a chair in front here," said the chief.

"I want to see who's behind that thing," growled the prisoner.

"You'd better go and sit down," said Felix significantly, and one of the blue-coats having placed a chair before the desk where the chief sat, the two now turned toward the prisoner, and in a moment he was sitting sulkily under the eye of Captain B—.

"Now," resumed the captain, "you have in your pocket the picture of a young woman; it was given to you on Wednesday, May the 11th by a man whom you saw two or three times after, always in the morning. You have not seen him since Saturday, the 14th. That man is a criminal; if you don't want to come to grief as his accomplice you will hand over that picture and make a clean breast of it. If you do this we shall let you go as soon as we have satisfied ourselves that you have told

the truth; all of it. If you refuse we shall shut you up and hold you as the accomplice of a—murderer."

The fellow was startled, he paled and then reddened. But his blood was up; at last he knew his ground.

"Ye cant' do it!" he said defiantly, "ye can't shut me up. I ain't a fool."

The corner of Captain B—'s mouth took a downward curve. He turned half round in his chair, as if turning his back upon the prisoner and all connected with him, and said with a wave of the hand toward the "boys:"

"Take that fellow and lock him up, just to convince him that he is a fool; and keep him locked up until he becomes wiser."

The prisoner's countenance fell. "What do ye want me to tell?" he asked, with the air of a man beaten at his own game.

"You know very well," the chief said sternly. "I advise you not to waste any more of my time."

The prisoner fumbled in his pocket, and finally drew forth a handful of soiled letters, play-bills and what appeared to be the battered fragment of a clown's song-book; from this collection he chose a dingy envelope, blank and unsealed, and half-rising, proffered it to the chief of police, who bent forward to receive it, and quickly disclosed its contents—the photograph of the missing girl, Bertha Warham.

"So," said Captain B—, "number one of the series turns up! tell us about it my man."

The prisoner rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"I'm tryin' to remember," he began.

"Let me help your memory; it was a big, dark-faced fellow—"

"That's so," assented the prisoner. "I had been to the train and was lookin' around among the markets thinkin' I might hit a fare—"

"Never mind what you were doing or thinking; just give me your interview with the man who gave you this," tapping the photograph which he held in his hand. "Time's flying."

"Well then, I was settin' on my box, when this fellow came up an' stood close by the carriage. I didn't notice him much at first but he stood there so long that finally I looked down an' see he was givin' me an' my rig a pretty good lookin' over. Then I squares round an' says, 'Have a carriage, sur?' He kind o' shook his head an' then he says—'Come down here, I want to speak to ye.' I jumped down an' then he commenced kind o' talkin round, an' the upshot of it was, he wanted to know about where I went, if I had a regular beat, an' if I was liable to run across persons that was strangers in the city. He said it seemed to him as if anyone in my business was purty apt, in runnin' to an' from depots an' hotels an' theaters an' the like, to see strangers, especially wimmen, if they was kind o' frisky and went about much. I told him that I s'posed I *was* as likely as anybody to run across such a person, an' then he told me that he had lost a sister; she had run away from home, and he had reason to think she was in the city. She was hansum an' kind o' fly away, he said, an' his idea was that if some one only watched long enough an' sharp enough, they'd find her some day among the theaters or other gay places, or maybe goin' an' comin' on the cars. Then he wound up by askin' me would I try my hand at findin' the gal; I wouldn't need to go out of my way, but jest to keep an' eye open, an' when I seen the gal jest to foller her, an find out where she stayed, an' then let him know."

"How?" queried Captain B--, as the prisoner paused here. "How were you to let him know?"

"He didn't give no name, nor tell me where he lived.



I was to find out where the girl went, and then carry the news to Old Mother Riggs, the old woman that keeps an apple-stand near the new theater—he would go there, or hear from her, twice a day."

"Well!" said Captain B—, somewhat impatiently, and with a fine sarcasm that was totally lost upon his prisoner—"Of course you promised to do all this?"

"Why, yes. I didn't see why I shouldn't."

"And of course," went on the captain, "you did it gratuitously—for humanity's sake."

The fellow looked perplexed, his question had flown too high.

"How much did he pay you?" jerked the captain, unconsciously improving his English.

"Umph!" sniffed the other as if this were the worst feature of the case. "He only give ten dollars to begin with, but he promised big pay if I found the girl. The next day he come round and give me the picture to help me out."

"Oh!" ejaculated the chief of police, "the *next* day! then *we* are wrong in our dates! But let that pass. How did you succeed?"

"Umph! he came around almost every morning, always askin' the same questions, as if he was afraid I'd give out if he didn't keep an eye on me. An' then all at once he was missin'. I hain't seen nor heard from him in a-most a week."

"And the girl?"

"Oh I ain't seen anything that even *looked* like her!"

The chief of police opened a ledger, or what appeared to be one, unfolded some papers, opened a drawer, looked into it and shut it with a sharp click. At that moment some one knocked at the office-door.

In obedience to a nod from his superior, Felix opened it half way, put his head out and listened to something

said in a low tone by a blue-coated person in the corridor. Then he closed the door.

"Two of them," answered Felix with a grin.

"Oh! wait a moment."

Then he turned and addressed his captive.

"Now sir, listen to me," he said sternly. "I am going to give you a chance to help, instead of hindering the police. There, you need not trouble yourself—I know all about it. I know the trade you carry on by daylight and *after dark*, and I know which division of the twenty-four hours brings you the most money. I'm going to have you well-looked-after; you need it. And now mark this: If this man should happen to turn up again, as he may, and if he comes to you, do you bring the news to me straightway; don't let grass grow under your feet, or your horses. You know how to do it well enough; make an appointment with him and then come to me. Another thing: if you *should* happen to see a face like this," holding up the photograph, "let us hear of that too. The better you serve us the better it will be for you; above all keep a very close mouth about this business; you are likely to get into trouble if you don't; and still more: keep to your old beats; don't make any changes, or try any dodges. I want you where I can find you at any moment, and no harm shall come to you so long as you deal squarely with us. But if you make any queer moves or happen to be missing some morning from your regular stand, you'll be hunted up very suddenly, and—I'm afraid you won't like what will happen next. See him out, Felix, and give him back his gun."

When Felix went out with his charge the blue-coated messenger who had waited without showed himself in the office doorway, hat in hand.

"We have brought in two of the fellows," he said, addressing the chief.

"Good," the latter said briskly.

"Bring them on; let's get this business off our hands. Bring them on—one at a time of course."

Then he took up the photograph of Bertha Warham, and thrust it into a drawer.

Nothing new was to be obtained from the latest two captures, and they were turned adrift much as was the first; and then the old apple-woman was brought before him.

She was easily dealt with. She had been approached by a young man "with an ugly scowlin' face, black eyes and hair, and as gawky as a spring gander," she averred. He had asked her to act the part of postmistress for him, to receive such messages as might be brought her for himself, and deliver them to him duly at a convenient corner where he would await her daily at a fixed hour. He would pay her well, and "that was all there was about it, 'cept that she hadn't had nary message for him, nor yet set an eye on him, since nigh a week ago, the very blessed day afore that awful murder in that North-side alley."

"It looks as if Carnes were right," mused Captain B—. "The fellow is seen by hackmen, apple-woman, and this boy Pat, the day before the murder, and is not seen by *anyone*, so far as heard from, *since*."

"There's one thing I don't quite understand," he said later to his favorite Felix. "And that is why Carnes has said nothing about sending someone to Upton to hunt up information about this fellow that he's so sure killed Mrs. Warham—this Larsen. I put that off on purpose to get his ideas about it. And he never thought of it, apparently."

"Apparently?" repeated Felix. "You never *can* tell



where to find Rufe Carnes. But I'll bet a white hat he ain't *asleep*."

The chief laughed.

"Anyway," went on Felix, "you haven't let *much* grass grow between here and Upton. The woman had lain at the morgue far into the second day before she was seen and identified by Colton. Then there was the delay of the inquest in order to get witnesses. It was five days before the body got to Upton. You don't mean to say that one of our men didn't go *with* it?"

"No, I don't. But I did not tell Carnes that."

"Well!" commented Felix. "Perhaps I'm speaking out of turn, Cap, but you'll remember that I was present at your interview with Mr. Colton and I heard him say that Dick Stanhope was in Upton."

"True."

"Well, Carnes knows that?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll wager he feels as safe about Upton matters as if he were there in person. He thinks Dick was a detective before the world was made."

Captain B-- laughed again.

"Felix, you have a long head, if it is young. If I did not need you here so much I would send you to Upton to spy out the land, but—"

"Oh, don't mention it, Cap." The young fellow got up and prepared to go out. "I know very well that you've vowed to the governor that I shan't be sent into unsafe work *this* year. It's all right, Cap, and I shan't quarrel with the governor, only—you may both make up your minds to this; I'm here to *stay*."

"George! But I begin to believe you, boy," and the captain sent a friendly smile after the retiring figure of the handsomest and youngest man upon his private force.

Two days have elapsed since the chief of police began

his siege upon the hack-drivers, and during these two days he has moved rapidly, aided by Felix and others of his force, each skillful in his degree, and all quite trustworthy.

Carnes meanwhile has not yet crossed the threshold of his room, but if his hands have been idle his brain has been busy. Taking such facts as he had at hand concerning the mystery of Mrs. Warham's murder, Bertha Warham's disappearance, and the strange conduct of Joseph Larsen, now vanished, as his vantage ground, he has let his thoughts go out in many directions, to return, laden with strange theories, fancies, and possibilities, to the point from whence they started. He has made copious notes too, contrary to his usual custom, and although they might seem, to other eyes than his, a strange jumble, he has preserved them, again in opposition to his habit, and seems to derive a sort of satisfaction from an occasional glance at their varied and characteristic contents.

These "notes," scribbled close and packed into small space among the leaves of a tiny black diary, lie upon the table opposite the captain, and Carnes himself, his head divested, for the first time, of patch and bandage, sits with his chair drawn squarely up to the table, upon which his elbows rest, looking across at his *vis à vis*, somewhat paler and thinner than his usual wont, and showing in his occasional movements a little less than his usual strength, but otherwise himself again. In a few days more, the pallor and weakness too, will be gone, and then he will have for a reminder of this episode of illness only two livid scars upon temple and cheek, which he will carry to his dying day.

"My point of view," said Carnes, "is clearly defined; and, if you go in for expansiveness, it wouldn't suit. It consists of an established fact (established in my mind

of course) and two propositions. Thus, fact foremost: Joseph Larsen killed Mrs. Warham. First proposition: Where to find said Joseph Larsen? second ditto, how to convict him when found. You see," taking up the diary and toying with it absently, "my outlook is *not* spacious; it is literally a *point*."

"Yes," assented Captain B—, "and like all other 'points,' you travel from it in any direction—down-hill."

Carnes uttered a short laugh.

"And you think," he said, "that success generally lies at the top?"

"I think that there may not be much difference, in the long run, in working from an idea, and working toward it. Now I grant that, from our stand point, your theory seems the most probable, but I have heard you say more times than once—"

"It's safe to distrust that which seems most probable," broke in Carnes impatiently. "Oh yes. You've heard me say *that*, and we've both heard somebody else say that 'the exception proves the rule.' Now I don't base my belief upon this most probable theory because it is the most probable, but because my feelings go with it."

"Your feelings!"

"Yes, feelings, instinct, impressions. If Patsy had not made his discoveries; if to my knowledge Larson had not met Mrs. Warham; if I had not been aware of their common search and common interests, but had known merely that they were both in the city, and they knew each other, I should still believe Larsen the guilty man. *But* if Patsy had not been a witness to their meeting and I supposed that *my* note, sent to the 'Owl', had been the cause of their coming together, I should feel that it was *my* hand that had loosed the blood-hound and turned him upon that unfortunate woman."



"Pshaw!" said the chief with an elastic move of his hand. "Your sickness has made you fanciful; leave 'instinct' to animals, 'feelings' to women, and 'impressions' to mediums. Let's get to business."

"As soon as you please," replied Carnes composedly. "All the same I thank my stars that it was not my decoy note that brought that dead woman and the scoundrel Larsen face to face." He removed his elbows from the table and leaned back in his chair. "You made a good beginning with the hackman and fakirs," he said; "you've got a link if you ever get a chain to match it, but it don't help us much to find Larsen, nor to understand his motives."

The chief of police laughed a short crisp laugh full of meaning, and a gleam of covert amusement lingered in his eyes and about the corners of his mouth as he thrust one hand into a breast pocket and said:

"Perhaps it will shake you in your security to know that the finger of suspicion, a *gloved* finger, has already pointed out another, possible—assassin. I think I hinted at this before."

He drew a letter from the pocket and held it up between his thumb and forefinger.

"This," he said, shaking the missive gently, "came to me three days ago; as you will see by the post-mark it has been delayed, in some of those cross-road postoffices through which it has traveled, more than a week—almost two. "Read it," and he tossed the letter across the table.

Carnes caught it deftly, opened it and glanced at the contents; then he started slightly, looked up, looked down again, and without speaking read the two written pages from beginning to end.

It was a laboriously scrawled missive signed "*One Who Knows*," and it informed the chief of police that if he

desired to find the murderer of Mrs. Warham he would do well to search for the dapper middle-aged person who had twice called upon that lady at the Avenue House. This man, so said the writer, had made an effort to extort money from Mrs. Warham by professing to be able to help her in her search for her step-daughter, and had proposed to take her to a place in the city where, he assured her, she might hear important news of the missing girl. The writer followed up these statements with a minute and very accurate description of Carnes as he had appeared, when calling upon Mrs. Warham at the Avenue House, and closed with the supposition that, tempted by a lavish display of gold and "jewelry," he had decoyed his victim into a portion of the city which he knew to be deserted at night, and there killed and robbed her.

All this was set forth in a rambling, awkward way, and the attempt to disguise both penmanship and personality was evident.

Captain B— seemed inclined to treat it lightly, as a rather absurd joke at Carnes expense, and nothing more serious, but Carnes when he had perused it, threw it upon the table and sat looking upon it with frowning brow.

"This," said the Captain as he stretched out his hand to take the letter and restore it to its envelope, "is one of the bright results of this precious, so-called, freedom of the press; some idiot about that hotel, a servant or perhaps a guest, happened to see you when you visited that woman; this description of you proves that they were interested, and observant. They have followed up the affair in the newspapers, letting their imagination run riot until this," tossing the letter down upon the table, "is the result. I dare say the person who wrote this has laid awake nights to study it out, and is going about at this moment looking upon himself in the light

of a public benefactor. No doubt he has looked to see it appear in the newspapers; and he may be denouncing *me* at this moment, as a lukewarm official who will perhaps connive at the escape of this guilty middle-aged party. Cranks! sensation hunters, they are born, bred and nourished by the 'family' newspapers. Why, if that letter had fallen into the hands of a reporter it would have furnished matter for a leader, and three or four columns, long ago."

"That sort of talk sounds like a chapter out of my book," said Carnes with a short laugh. "So far as the newspapers are concerned we agree perfectly. But you're wrong about this letter."

"Wrong! How?"

"Wrong as to its origin; Joseph Larsen wrote that letter."

Captain B— favored him with a questioning stare.

"You don't agree with me," said Carnes smiling slightly. "Come, we'll put it to the test, and it can't be done too soon. Haven't I heard you say that one of your men was an expert at handwriting?"

"Yes, Felix."

"Well, give him this letter, or a part of it, and send him to the Galloway House. Let him get at the register. Larsen is registered there as *John Larkins*; then send him to the other houses where Larsen has been. I'll give you the names and dates. If he don't say that this letter and the registered name was witten by the same hand, I'll believe anything you reccomend. Do it?"

"I will," said the chief, "you may be right and I wrong. I'll do it at once. Felix is the man, too."

"Wait though," said Carnes with a grin. "There's another name on the Galloway register, same page, name of another missing man. I'll write a few lines and you give him both. If he understands his business he can



convince us both. If he can identify my handwriting upon that ledger, you and I will be satisfied with whatever he says about the other. But we've lost valuable time if this letter was sent by Larsen, and I'm convinced that it was; we've lost a rare chance."

"That's true," said the chief, and then he started up suddenly, "Why," he said, "here's a pretty good test. If that thing *was* written by some crank who reads the newspapers, he has probably written a similar letter to Sharp; we must find out about that."

"Umph!" sniffed Carnes. "If Sharp had received such a letter it would have made meat for the reporters long before this. It's one of his stock tricks, to exploit these matters."

"And yet," said the chief half to himself, "Sharp and his men have done some good things."

"Of course they have!" said Carnes testily. "I don't quarrel with their work, but with their *method*. They *might* rest on their merits, but they won't. They must keep up a hue and cry of sensationalism," his voice rising. "Now *I* am going to predict—come in!"

Some one was tapping sharply at the door, and the sudden fall of his voice, as Carnes uttered these two last words, accompanied as it was by as sudden a collapse of pose and gesture, struck both orator and auditor as extremely absurd, and the new-comer as he entered the room was greeted by two faces turned toward him and smiling broadly. Then their momentary amusement became a gleam of welcome, and both men sprang to their feet.

"Dick!" cried Carnes, "Dick Stanhope! You're the very man we want!"

"And you are the very man *I* want," said Stanhope as he extended a hand to each; "*both* of you. The very men!"

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### CHIEFS IN COUNCIL

There were many things to be said by way of greeting. Dick Stanhope was the one being in all the world, for whom Carnes professed an abiding friendship. And this regard, the handsome young fellow, almost as much alone in the world as Carnes himself, returned with a frank affection.

He had heard little news from the city during his absence, except such as pertained to the case upon which his energies were bent, and he was quick to note the change in his friend, his pallor, and the scars, scarcely healed.

But each of the three men were intent upon the same object, and each was anxious to begin upon the subject, which was of mutual interest. So the door was locked, and secure against intruders, the three drew close together around the table, and Stanhope, looking from one to the other as he spoke, began:

"I suppose you both know where I have been?"

Both his listeners nodded.

"Colton has told me of his business with you, Captain B—, so I understand *your* connection with this affair; but this individual," with a movement of the hand toward Carnes, "seems to have gotten his nose into the business, too. I don't understand *that*."

"Umph!" grunted Carnes. "More's the pity! I shall have to waste so much more of my precious breath on you. My nose *is* in it. It's in with a vengeance! And

now before we go farther, let me ask just what *you* want of us? You said—"

"I said that I wanted you both; your co-operation, your advice; and now," thrusting a hand into his breast, and bringing forth a large, flat, square packet, "what did you mean by sending for that?"

Carnes took the packet from his hand, and rapidly removed the papers that enfolded a cabinet photograph.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed. "There he is; look at him, Captain "

The chief of police took the picture, and scanned it eagerly.

"He is an ugly looking customer," he said finally.

"Not half so ugly as the original," said Dick Stanhope.

Instantly the eyes of his two companions were fixed upon him:

"Have you seen him?" they both said with one breath.

"Seen him? Yes—I should say so!"

"Dick Stanhope!" cried Carnes, springing up and seizing his friend by the shoulder. "Have you *seen* that fellow since Lucretia Warham was found dead?"

"What ails you, old man!" said Stanhope, laughing, "Of course I have seen him since. I saw him at her funeral, saw him at her grave. He was at John Warham's house when the news of her death arrived. Why, Carnes—old man, what ails you?"

"What ails me!" cried Carnes, now pale with excitement. "Dick Stanhope, have you lost your cunning?—have you lost your eyes; your senses? Where was your skill, you, student of the 'physiognomy of things,' that you could not suspect, dream, *guess*, that you saw before you, Lucretia Warham's *murderer*?"

"*No!*" Stanhope sprang up, and with both hands forcibly wrested his friend's grasp from his shoulder;



and now, he too was pale, and regardless, in his excitement, that he still held his friend's hand, clutched between his own strong fingers.

"No, no, Carnes!" he said again. "It can't be true! Why—why, it would be terrible! Man, you don't know what has happened!"

"I know that we are letting a murderer escape! I know that Joseph Larsen killed Mrs. Warham!—and I'll convince you that he did, if you will sit down and listen." He drew away his hands and turned to resume his seat, almost quivering with excitement. "But first," he strove to speak calmly—"do you know where he is *now*?"

Stanhope sat down, calming himself by a visible effort.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I know where he is!" He took out his handkerchief and passed it slowly across his brow.

The chief of police, sitting opposite, a silent, watchful observer, made an impatient movement and said, a touch of sarcasm in his tone:

"To an uninitiated observer, my friends, this looks—slightly melodramatic. There is considerable evidence, Stanhope, of the circumstantial kind, I regret to say, pointing toward this Larsen as the guilty man. Why it strikes you as improbable and shocking beyond the ordinary, I confess myself unable to see."

Stanhopes's eyes turned toward him and his tone was respectful but by no means apologetic as he said:

"I have never been considered, nor considered myself soft-hearted, Captain B—, but I am not yet so old in my profession as to be entirely unaffected by the hideousness of this thing, if it is true. If Joseph Larsen killed this woman, he killed *his own mother*, not knowing the truth. And he learned that she *was* his mother, standing beside her confined body."

"My God!" ejaculated Rufus Carnes, and the chief of police caught his breath and sat staring straight before him.

In the silence which followed, Richard Stanhope consulted his watch, took from his pocket some papers and a small note-book, and drew his chair up to the table.

"You have said some things," he began, "which I cannot understand; but I came here to tell you what I know, and as you seem to be already enlisted, we may arrive at something like an understanding sooner and easier, perhaps, if I tell my story first, as it includes the beginning of this strange affair, which seems to grow more complicated at every step, and promises to lead us a long chase. Shall I go on?"

The chief of police nodded and settled himself to listen.

"By all means," said Carnes in a subdued tone, and then he did a characteristic thing. The photograph of Joseph Larsen lay upon the table, face uppermost directly before him, and he took up a long thin paper knife, and with it deftly turned the photograph over, with the air of one who hides from his sight a loathsome thing.

"That fellow's face infuriates me as the red flag does the bull," he said sinking back in his chair. "Now, Dick, begin."

"It is several days since Mr. Colton met me on the street and asked me to go with him at once to his office," began the young detective. I think that he might, if he had not happened upon me just then, have employed another agent, perhaps; although he was good enough to say that he had me in view from the first. However that may be, I was unoccupied and I went with him. It was very little that he had to say; only that one Mr. John Warham, a friend and client, had tel-

ographed him that morning, asking him to send at once an able detective at any cost, and would I go. The distance was considerable, and the business so vague that I would have declined promptly but for those three words, "at any cost." When a thrifty Illinois farmer tacks those three expansive words to such a telegram, it means something uncommon; so I told Mr. Colton that I would go. He handed me over a handsome sum to cover my expenses and as a 'retaining fee,' that's how *he* put it, and in an hour I was off. I was to go straight into the presence of Mr. Warham upon arrival, so after a little reflection I 'made up' as a sort of cross between a seedy parson and a needy school-teacher, out of employment, and I was setting out for Upton when I met you, Carnes, philandering with Patsy Reagan on that old hack.

"Now I'm anxious to get this thing over with, so I will not begin at the beginning and take you over the ground as I went over, but I'll tell you the story from my present point of view. It'll save time, and I can answer questions and go into details later, if I don't make things plain enough."

"Very good," said the chief. Carnes only nodded.

"Old John Warham lives five miles from the town of Upton, and he is accounted the richest farmer in that portion of the state; he has been all his life a farmer and understands his business better than two of us here present," with a sweep of the hand including Carnes and himself, "understand *ours*. He understands some other things tolerably well, and there are some few things which he understands not at all. In short he's shrewd, but his shrewdness is limited. He's obstinate—but there's no limit to that. When I knew the man I could easily account for those three words: '*at any cost*.' Warham lives in a big, expensive new farm-house. They



wouldn't call it a farm-house, mind you, but a 'residence.' You can see just such places all through the country—big, sprawling, showy outside, cramped and crooked, and divided into as many rooms as possible, inside; built by contract; big money, small comfort. But this is 'parenthesis.' Warham lived here with his second wife and his daughter, Bertha, until the night, now some three weeks ago, when she, the daughter, disappeared. It was another case of missing bride, for on the evening of the next day she was to have been married, to a merchant of Upton almost as old and as rich as her father. He was not a bridegroom to gush over; all his attractions were tied up in his money-bags; you can find a few such men in every town, quiet, correct, all his wit absorbed in money-getting; driving a hard bargain all the week, going to church on Sunday and staying to Sunday-school; run in a rut all his life, expecting when he got his young wife to keep her in the rut too. I fancy John Warham's money had fascinated him quite as much as John Warham's daughter. But he had no hand in her disappearance; I may as well say that now, and let him drop. He was dreadfully shocked, of course, but his grief was more for himself than for the loss of a wife. The affair dragged him out of his rut, and made him unpleasantly conspicuous for a time. It wasn't in his scheme of life, which consisted only of money-getting and money-saving, week days; going to church twice on Sunday, marrying and burying, and being born. The affair, as I say, shook him up wofully, but as soon as he decently could he scrambled back into his rut again, and there we will leave him; he's sure to 'stay put.' By the by, don't infer from my comments that I disapprove of going to church, twice if you like, on a Sunday; on the contrary it's a thing I approve, and recommend—ahem—to both of you."

The chief smiled indulgently at this digression, but Carnes, with his eyes fastened moodily upon the reversed picture, made no sign that he heard.

"When the old man—Warham, I mean of course—was told that his daughter was missing, he never said a word but went straight to her room and himself examined every detail; he examined the bed which was awkwardly tumbled but evidently had not been slept in, took account of the disarranged furniture, and then went below; when he went out he locked the door and took the key with him, and, thanks to one of his whims, the room remained just as they found it. His first tilt, in behalf of the belief he was silently working toward, was with his wife, who, during the day, demanded the key that she might 'set the room to rights.' The old man refused and commanded his wife and all hands to keep away from that room, and to make sure that they *did*, he kept, and still keeps the key. That night he announced his belief that his daughter had been forcibly abducted and killed or worse, and he clung and still clings to that belief. He has been a hard old fellow and as hard upon himself as upon others. By the time he had reached his conclusion he broke down; anxiety, suspense, and overwork mastered him, held him to his bed, and he is there yet; rather, he divides his time between that and an invalid's chair.

"It appears that the marriage that was so suddenly postponed was not Miss Bertha Warham's first venture in that direction; she had been engaged to this same Joseph Larsen, and their engagement had lasted almost a year when it was broken off. They had quarreled and compromised before, but finally she dismissed him. He was badly cut up—all agree upon that point—and talked and acted like a madman. He hung about until a few days before that set for the marriage, then he disappeared and

was not seen again until the girl had been missing more than a week."

"Stop!" interposed Carnes suddenly; "*when* did he make his last appearance there, Dick?"

"He showed himself at Warham's place on the night before the woman's body was sent home, came late in a pouring rain."

"Were you there? Did you see him there?"

"I was there. I saw him—"

"Wait!" again broke in Carnes. "On what day did this news—this—telegram reach Upton?"

Stanhope consulted his note-book. "On Monday—at or near noon," he replied.

"Umph!" ejaculated Carnes, "more than thirty-six hours after the deed was done. And you say that he arrived in the vicinity the evening—"

"The *night* before."

"Oh! Then he must have reached Upton—"

"At eleven o'clock precisely—by the late express. He walked to the house—five miles."

As Carnes, growing more restless with every word that he uttered, was about to launch another question, the chief of police lifted a warning finger.

"Carnes," he said, "we are putting Stanhope off the track and we promised him attention. To keep you in peace for a half-hour or so, I will just mention what you may already know—that Larsen *might* have left the city by either of two routes at midnight on the night the murder was committed, and reach Upton as he did."

"I didn't know that, Cap," said Carnes with a look of relief. "I feel better. Drive on, Dick."

"When I went to Upton," resumed the young detective, smiling indulgently at his restless friend, "the question was *not* who killed Mrs. Lucretia Warham, you will please remember, but, what has become of Miss Bertha



Warham? And that, gentlemen, if I may be permitted to suggest, I think should be our question *now*, for, after considerable thought and investigation I am convinced that this girl, living or dead, is at the bottom of the well we are trying to fathom.

"She must be the Devil!" said Carnes, bluntly.

"When a woman is handsome, clever, ambitious, visionary, perfectly fearless and unscrupulous in getting her own way, there is no need to call in the Devil. I think that I've read that somewhere, gentlemen. It sounds, now that it's out, too *epigrammatic* to be original with me. Perhaps I got it of Carnes here, *epigram* is in his line. However you're welcome to it and I'm anxious to get to the end of my story; there's a good deal of it to unload."

He went rapidly over some of the ground, but when he came to the part which concerned Joseph Larsen he grew graphic and told his story in detail. Up to the point where Susan announced her intention to go in person after the officers, his auditors listened silently, but here Carnes broke out.

"By Jove! I like that Susan! Are there any more women like her down there, Dick?"

"No. Nor anywhere else. Like her! well so do I. I adore her, in spite of her sharp nose, and her straight calico gowns, and her forty years or so. At this present moment Susan is the only woman who holds a reserve seat in my heart. I wish she were twenty instead of—"

"If she were twenty she'd be a fool," snapped Carnes. "I dare say she *was* a fool at twenty. Did she go for the sheriff?"

"She did indeed, harnessed her own horse and drove like a jockey. Brought back a sheriff and a fat sensible little lawyer."

"Why a lawyer?" interposed Captain B——.

"Well, you see, I had promised Larsen not to tell his

story, and I wanted to keep my word. At the same time I wanted to 'perpetuate' the story; and I was afraid he wouldn't always remember it. I thought his symptoms were bad. You know I've had some experience with lunatics, Carnes."

Carnes nodded.

"Well, Larsen was in just the condition to be mastered; he was worn out mentally and physically, and I never let up my grip on him, from the time Susan left us until she came back with her men. I kept him under the influence of my eye and voice; I made him lie down and then I sat down close by the bed with my little gun on my knee, and talked to him. By the time they came, he was prepared to make his deposition. The little lawyer took down his story very much as I have told it to you."

"Stanhope," said Captain B——, "you have not told us what you think about that story yet."

"Wait," said the narrator, "I am not done with Larsen."

"While the lawyer was taking down Larsen's story," said Stanhope, resuming his narrative, "we heard more or less commotion below. But I did not see fit to leave my post, and the lawyer took no notice of it but went straight on with his work. Larsen seemed quite restless, and sometimes he stopped to listen and the lawyer had to start him again. It made me feel a bit uneasy, for I thought the old man had taken a turn for the worse; but the sheriff was downstairs, and so was Susan; and I stuck to my post until the deposition was made and signed; then I asked the lawyer to go down and send up the sheriff, intending to turn my prisoner over to him at once. Just as he was going, I heard horses' hoofs galloping away and said to myself, they are going for the doctor.

"When the sheriff came in he said, 'they want you downstairs, young man,' and I knew by his look and tone that something had happened. So I just told him who I was, and that Larsen was under suspicion, and laid my pistol on the table beside him, as I went out. At the foot of the stairs I met Susan and she told the whole story in a breath, in her sensible way. 'We have just had a message from Mr. Colton,' she said, 'Lucretia Warham has been murdered.'

"'Lucretia?' I began, for I didn't know the woman's name.

"'John's wife,' she said. 'They are going to bring the body home. He wants you.'

"I think that I rather expected to find the old man prostrate; instead I found him sitting up in bed and not seeming particularly grief-stricken, but much shocked and strong with the strength of excitement.

"'Shut the door,' he said, the moment I entered the room. 'Has Susan told you?' I said 'yes,' and took a seat beside the bed.

"'It's a horrible thing,' he said, 'I can't understand it. Colton has the body in charge and telegraphs for instructions. I told him to send it on with a decent escort.' Then he switched off abruptly: 'Susan says it was you that sent for the sheriff?' 'Yes,' I said.

"'What for?' he asked, and I said that it was to put Larsen under arrest.

"'I thought so,' he said. And then he told me in few and plain words that Larsen must not be taken out of the house until after his wife's funeral; he might be as much of a prisoner as we liked, but he must be kept there; he must be there when the body came, and there when it was buried.

"I arranged with the sheriff of course, and he sent out a deputy to look after Larsen, who did not seem to need



much looking after; he lay upon the bed most of the time dumb and stupid enough. He took his meals in his room, and never left it until the body came. Susan had been the one to tell him the news, and she said he took it dumbly, as he did about all we said to him. I told him it was the old man's wish that he should stay there until after the funeral, and he took that dumbly too.

"The day the body was expected his adopted mother came; she was Mrs. Warham's sister, and she just about filled the house with her wailing. When *it* came, and was cared for and shut up in its coffin in the big parlor, Susan came to me and said that the old man wanted me to bring Larsen down; he was waiting for us in the parlor, alone with the body. He had been sitting up nearly all day and dragging himself about from room to room. The doctor said we must not interfere with him, it would do no good.

"I was beginning to get uneasy about Larsen; I felt about as comfortable as I would sitting over the crater of a volcano that was beginning to rumble. The fellow had been stolid and dumb so long, that I felt sure it would take very little to break him up and then—well I won't anticipate; before I went after him I hunted up the doctor and asked him to be within call, should anything happen in the parlor.

"When we went in Larsen started, and I felt him shiver; the old man had opened the shutters of one window and it let a stream of light straight into the middle of the room where he stood alone at the foot of the shrouded coffin.

"Larsen stopped short just inside the door, and looked at that coffin with a fixed stare that made my blood run cold. I've been in some tight places, I've seen some fearful sights, but for a scene of downright, cold,

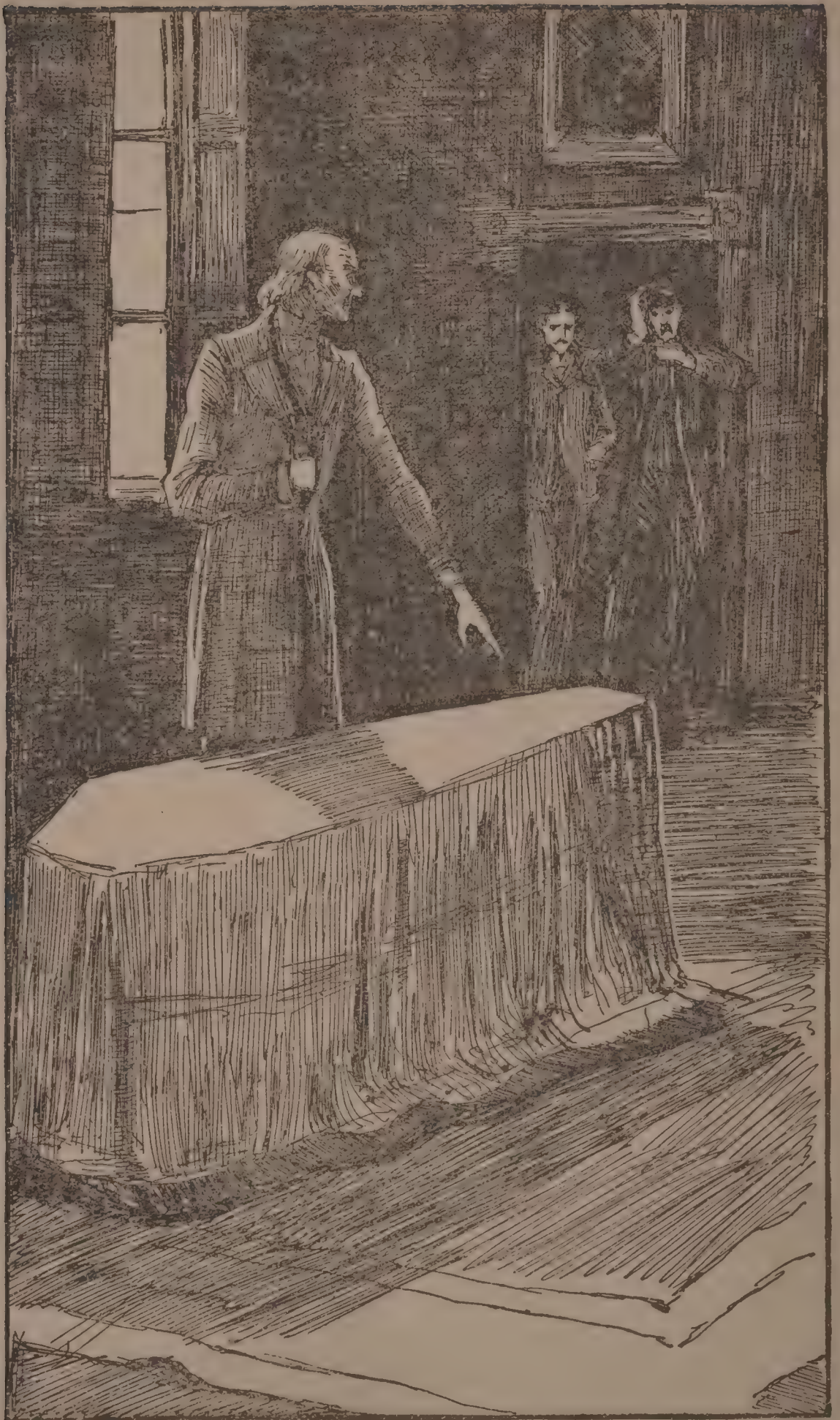
clammy, blood-curdling horror, that scene surpassed."

He drew a long breath and looked slowly from one listener to the other before he resumed.

"The old man began to speak without lifting his eyes from the coffin. 'Joe,' he said slowly, "they say that you know more about my poor girl than you will ever tell, and may be it's true. If it is, you may take this that I am about to tell you, as the beginning of your punishment, and you may look to that young man there beside you for the end of it: but whether it's true or not it's my duty to tell you this: I found it out a good while ago, and *she* knew that I did; it made some difference, some trouble between us. Bertha found it out too—accidentally.' The old man stopped and moistened his lips and seemed to brace himself. I couldn't imagine what was coming. 'Bertha was pretty badly shocked,' he went on, 'and I guess it may have made some difference in her feelings toward you; 'twould be natural. But she promised not to tell, and she was a girl to keep her word.

"'Joe, this poor murdered woman lying here *was your mother*. She caused you to be adopted into her own family, and the elders, her father and mother, knew the truth; and that's why they gave you their name, Larsen; your adopted mother never knew the truth, and don't now. *She's* always kept a kind of watch over you, and she's made a will leaving all her money to you. 'Twas agreed between us. I think she was strongly tempted to tell you sometimes. I'm *sure* she was. There's no doubt about all this; there's proofs enough although we've kept 'em so close. *She was your mother*, Joe; I—I don't know *who* your father was.' I had been so astonished myself that I had kept my eye upon the old man instead of Larsen, and as I turned I had just one glimpse of him before he went down. He was clutching at





“JOE, THIS POOR MURDERED WOMAN LYING HERE WAS YOUR MOTHER.”  
—Slender Clue, p. 352.





his throat, with his eyes fairly bulging out of his head, and still riveted upon that coffin; a purple wave seemed to surge from his neck to his temples and his lips were white with froth; he made a lurch forward as if to approach the coffin, and then with the howl of a demon he toppled over and lay at full length and perfectly rigid, half-underneath it.

"The doctor was there in a moment and with his first conscious breath forced down a strong opiate; we kept him quiet with opiates until after the funeral; Warham seemed bent on dragging him through it, and he did, but when it was over the fellow broke again. The doctor said it was of no use—"

"Stanhope," cried Carnes in strong excitement, "*what* are you driving at? *Where* is Larsen now?"

"He's in a mad-house."

"*Insane!*"

Stanhope thrust both hands deep down into his pockets and stretched out his legs like a man with a burden off his mind.

"If he isn't insane," he said, "he's doing some astonishing acting, and a good deal of unnecessary damage."

"How does he act?"

"Like a mad dog! like a demon. In padded walls and a straight jacket. Ironed to the floor."

"Do *you* believe him insane, Dick?"

"Upon my word I don't know *what* to think."

"And do you believe his story about the girl?"

"There you are again! And thereby hangs the rest of my story; but a man can't talk forever and never eat. Let's adjourn for luncheon. Carnes, I haven't heard your side of this story yet."

## CHAPTER XXXV

### A STUDY OF CHARACTERISTICS

When they had refreshed themselves, and Carnes had made clear to Stanhope all that had happened during the time of his absence, he came back to the old question.

"Do you believe that Larsen told the truth about Bertha Warham?"

The chief of police had been called away from their council and the two detectives were again in Carnes' room, smoking after their late repast.

"I think we are about ready to discuss that point," said Stanhope. "The thing does not look improbable. Let us suppose now that Larsen's importunities tried the girl, and perhaps frightened her a little, not for herself, I think she must have been incapable of personal fear, but for the man she was about to marry. She might have felt convinced that Larsen would do him harm, or there might have been mixed motives. Perhaps she was a little tired of her bargain, and, driven half-desperate by Larsen's threats and importunities; she must have been disgusted with him too, and perhaps planned a revenge that would rid her of him and her elderly lover at the same breath. She would give Larsen the trouble of carrying her off, and then leave him in the lurch. There is just one strong fact in support of this theory."

"What is that."

"At the last, I got from John Warham a bit of intelligence that I should have heard sooner. I had a sort



of suspicion, and went to him and asked point-blank if the girl had any considerable amount of money at her command, before she disappeared. I told him that it was an important point. He made me promise not to mention it to Susan, and then admitted that he had given Bertha a large check, only a week before, as an installment of her marriage portion; and that she must have had, besides this sum, between two and three thousand of her mother's legacy left. It appears that she had paid out fully half of that legacy for the furniture and jim-cracks that she had collected in her rooms, and for sundry valuable bits of jewelry. She left neither money nor jewels behind her."

"Oh, ho!" said Carnes rubbing his chin, and looking as if considering a conundrum.

Stanhope drew forth from the breast of his coat a bulky package and threw it upon the table between them.

"I think it's the right time to read these letters," he said; "I have marked such portions as I wished to refer to, and to call to your attention. But read them all; we don't usually see alike, and you may find something that I have overlooked."

"And what did *you* find, youngster?" asked Carnes as he untied the bundle.

"The key to the girl's character."

"Umph! what are these?" holding up three papers folded together and unlike the others.

"The things I found in her room; Larsen's letter, Rose Hildreth's letter. The fragment of letter written by Bertha to Larsen in which she refers to a *secret*."

"Oh! well, amuse yourself, Dick; I'm going in for correspondence."

"Go ahead," said Stanhope cheerfully.

A long time Carnes read and wrinkled his brows, and

Stanhope smoked and lounged. The stillness of the room was broken only by the rustling of paper or the occasional movements of the two men.

Finally Carnes put the last letter down and turned a puzzled face toward his companions.

"That's a precious batch of correspondence!" he said sarcastically. "A key to character is it? I should say there was material enough for a dozen characters. I've passed over your marked extracts, Dick, along with the rest, and I've added a few marks of my own. Draw up here now, and let's go over these precious selections together."

Stanhope drew his chair forward and Carnes reversed a little pile of letters that lay before him, so that the one at the bottom should come first to his hand.

"Now then," he said, "for extract number one."

He took up the first letter and began to read aloud the portion outlined by Stanhope's blue pencil.

"The house is done at last; at least I shall enjoy my rooms; they *are* two, though only separated by an arch. In the city you would call them a *suite*. Susan says 'the bedroom with a sink in it.' When I come up to the city to select my furniture, you will go with me. I say you will,' you *must*. I shall *take* you. Father says that I will spend all my money for flummery. Why shouldn't I? there is not enough to *save*. Four or five thousand dollars, what is that? they have limited notions of wealth here in Upton. *My* notion is to have not one or two rooms but a great house splendidly and tastefully furnished; to have my own carriage, my box at the opera, and a welcome in 'Our best society,' always assured. But *I* could not value riches and luxury at the expense of reputation, and social position. Rose, that is one of the things that I *cannot* understand. How is it that our cities and cemeteries are crowded with women who are

and who seem content to be, well dressed *lepers*? What can money give these women? food and shelter, such as a rare animal may have, nothing more. Oh, money with position and power is one thing, money without these is worse than nothing."

"There's sentiment for you," commented Carnes as he put the letter aside. "Well-dressed lepers! Well, that is characteristic. Let's try another."

"Perhaps it is not altogether my fault, Rose, if I hold 'queer notions.' All the notions that have ever come under my observation—very crude they were—are—have been 'queer.' The notion, always given the first place by my father, that one must get money, and *keep* it, has come down to me in a modified form—get money and *spend* it. Susan's notions, well, you may say they are the notions of the feminine half of this community: Monday wash, or overlook the proceeding. It's a part of their life; these women, if their *hands* are not in the tub their *hearts* are. Mondays are not hot days or cold days, fair days or foul, bright days or dark. They are, every one of them, summer and winter through, every year of an Upton woman's natural life, *wash days*. There is also included in their 'six days of labor,' an ironing day, a baking day and a '*cleaning up* day.' The last the worst of the lot. And this is what it will be to become Mrs. Joseph Larsen! Larsen—oh, the ugly name! and Joseph too, Josie! Joe! Oh-h-h! A dancing bear!"

Carnes threw down the letter with a short dry laugh. "Upon my word," he said, "that is an extraordinary girl. She must have written *that* on a wash-day. Now listen to this."

"It's all very well for you to philosophize and 'talk



*sense*'—Rose Hildreth talking sense is a joke, I think—Bah! I am in no mood for sense—*sense!* common sense! the very commonest kind, that is our daily diet here, that and pork and beans, corned beef and cabbage. It's the *truth*, Rose, sitting here in my bower surrounded by my beautiful things, I can't keep the odor of cabbage from my nostrils. When I build a house—oh, there we have talked that all over, you and I. Our houses are built—in Spain—they are glittering and glowing without and within."

"Umph," grunted Carnes. "Now here's another passage "

"Positively, Rose, if it were not for my room and my pony, I should go mad; and oh, my *habits!* yes, there are *two*, one cloth, regulation thing, tall hat, white veil, gauntlets. It need not be ashamed of itself in Central Park. The other—well, you know my taste—it would grace a nobleman's hunt, a castle drawbridge, Rome, the Arena. Do you know I am thinking seriously of saddling Wild-bird some fine night and running away, with my two dainty habits—you may be sure they cost a round sum—to join—a *circus*. Only—*only* you know what I mean—I am luxurious 'clean through'—to wheel and whirl in an amphitheater, gorgeous with banners and lights, and palpitating with music, cheered by the plaudits of a throng, is *one* thing. To be dragged about the country o' nights; to doff my robes and plumes in a dingy dressing tent; to eat and drink and sleep on the wing, and to have for my associates illiterate athletes, profane clowns, vulgar tobacco-chewing banner-bearers; not to mention the woman who walks the tight rope outside the tent before the performance, the snake-charmer, feminine of course—since the Devil made his

first great success in the same role, he's been reluctant to trust it to a blundering man. Look before you leap, Rose. I've looked on all sides of the circus tent, and even peeped under the canvas, and *it's settled*. I *won't* be an actress in the ring."

Carnes laid this letter down and stole a glance at Stanhope. The young man was lighting a fresh cigar and looking perfectly indifferent. "Well!" he said after a moment of silence, "why don't you go on?"

Carnes took up the next letter and began to read.

"I don't like the way you go on about that unfortunate girl. The adjective is *yours*, not mine; I can imagine myself in many roles. Doing various 'reckless' things, a fanatic, an adventuress, even a murderess, but I *can't* imagine myself in *that* girl's place; please don't ask it of me. Imagine myself 'and all for love' becoming that wretched thing, a man's lightest toy—*never!* If I ever find myself loving a man too much, I'll run away from him, put the breadth of the world between us. In my opinion this love is a disease of the blood, a vile epidemic; if I caught it I would go straight to a doctor—a woman would better be *dead* than madly in love with a man she cannot rule."

Carnes laid this letter down and turning in his chair looked squarely at Stanhope.

"That must be the letter that called out Rose Hil-dreth's protest, as too shocking for her mother's nerves," said the latter taking the cigar from between his lips. "Did you note what she says about going on the stage?"

"Umph! yes. Wait, let's read it again. I think I see your drift. Here it is."

"So you are stage-struck, Rosie. Well, of course it

had to come; every passably good-looking girl discovers, sooner or later, that she was born to be an actress. You *have* some pretty talent, my dear, but I fancy that you can find employment for your little talent *off* the stage; you precious little goose, *every* woman of society, every woman of the world is an actress, more or less. And the better the actress the more successful the woman. The woman who can't laugh when she's sad, and smile when she's 'mad,' and treat detestable people as though she adored them is at a lamentable disadvantage in this world. Now *I* am an actress. I am not particularly proud of it. Why should I be? I was *born* an actress, and, on or off the stage I dare say I shall die dramatically. But the stage is not my *first* choice—I have other ambitions. I couldn't begin a ballet-girl at eight dollars a week, at the mercy of managers, landladies, everybody, any more than I could travel with a circus. But if some day I should come into possession of a little fortune, money enough, say, to clothe me richly and enable me to live above salaries and independent of managers and landladies, then I *might* venture. And this is how I would begin. I would go to the manager of a first-class theater and say to him: I believe there is the making of an actress in me, and I am willing to work for fame. If you will give me an opportunity to 'try my 'prentice hand,' with a company of good actors, I will wait your time, I will begin at the bottom, so far as work goes; speak one line or pose in a ball-room scene and remain mute. I will wait for an opening or a vacancy. I will promise to dress and behave like a lady, and I will accept what pay you choose to give me. Then if I could not make myself known and felt within the year I would say, 'go to, you are *not* an actress, you are only another mistaken woman.' And I should feel sure that I had only myself to thank for my failure "



"At this present moment," said Stanhope, when Carnes paused and looked over at him, "if that girl is alive and well she is probably in a position to put that idea of hers into execution."

"That's true. Now let us suppose that she *is* alive and adrift in this city or some other, what then?"

"Well, I think Larsen's scheme was not a bad one, whether he was honest in his search or not. I think it would be wise to have some more copies of that photograph made and distributed pretty freely—"

"Among the theaters?"

"Among the reporters, *first*. The various chiefs and heads of bureaus are already supplied I suppose."

Carnes nodded.

"Then we *might* go the rounds of the theaters."

"Now?"

"Well—suppose I take one of the pictures and call upon—say Manager Velly, I tell him a convenient little story, and ask him to keep an eye open for such an applicant, and, when she comes, to engage her, off-hand, at our expense."

"Umph!" said Carnes with one of his characteristic frowns. "You will want to draw it mild, or he will gobble her up and bill her as the heroine of the great sensation, or scandal, the supposed victim and probable cause of a murder."

"That's a fact; we mustn't make her too interesting; she'll be likely to do that for herself fast enough. But really I don't see that we can do much more, just now. If Larsen's lunacy takes a talkative turn he may give us a hint. But he is guarding a secret of some sort; he's dumb as a mute."

"Yes—a good deal of method in his madness. I must go down and see him in a day or two. I may fancy playing lunatic myself."

"*You* think he's shamming altogether, Carnes. I don't. Why, look at it. If his story *is* true, to begin with, if, after eloping with this girl with whom he was so infatuated and after she had eluded him, he encountered this woman, quarreled with her and then murdered her, to learn immediately after that he has killed his own mother, he must have a wonderfully well-balanced brain, *not* to go mad. And he had *not* a well-balanced brain. He had been torn to tatters with disappointment and rage for days, going without food and sleep, feeding upon his own excitement. It was enough to drive him mad."

"That's so," assented Carnes.

"The doctors pronounced it insanity, brought on by nervous excitement, and they do not consider it incurable. It is our business now to keep an eye upon him, and if we are not satisfied that he is in safe hands, to have him removed to another asylum. We must make sure that he is not discharged without our knowledge."

"I'll make sure of *that*," growled Carnes, "if I have to wait for him at the door of the asylum all summer with a warrant in my fist. When the *doctors* get through with him, *I'll* take him in hand. Powers! how I hate that fellow!"

"Yes. You hated him at sight. It's not his crimes that caused it."

"I know it. It was instinct."

"Well, I almost pitied the fellow that night when we brought him in out of the rain. But my attachment did not grow. When they took him away, he was the incarnation of a baffled demon."

"I wish we knew more of his capabilities. If he killed that girl and then began a hunt for her, merely to furnish himself with a defense, in case of arrest, he is a deep one. We may look for lively work, if ever

he comes back to his senses, or they to him. And the boldness, the hardihood he displayed in going back to that murdered woman's home!"

"Yes," said Stanhope thoughtfully, "Susan called my attention to something to which I did not attach much importance at the time. Looking back to it now it appears quite significant."

"What was it?"

"When Susan came to us in the kitchen, to tell her plans for the night, she told Larsen that *he* was to sleep in Mrs. Warham's room. Now, he was not supposed to know that she was absent, but he made no comment upon this, and showed no surprise—Susan noted it, and spoke of it later."

"That Susan must be a regular character," said Carnes reaching for a match and preparing to light a cigar. "I like her."

"So do I," said Stanhope fervently.



## CHAPTER XXXVI

### A TANGLE

Joseph Larsen's violence, whether real as Stanhope half-believed, or feigned as Carnes *more* than half-believed, did not abate.

Days passed and the two men visited him frequently, and finally managed his removal to another hospital, where the physician in charge was taken into their confidence.

Doctor Bluthardt was a grave, honest, competent physician, and they knew that Larsen, in his hands, was sure of humane treatment in his wildest moments; and that any appearance of returning intelligence, or suspicion of duplicity, would be promptly reported.

When they had seen their insane quarry safe in the care of the good doctor, they felt that their vigilance, in one direction, might now relax.

"We know where we may look for Larsen, worse luck," said Carnes grumpily, to his familiar; "now where may we look for a trace of Bertha Warham?"

They had placed the girl's picture in the hands of a good photographer, who had hastened to furnish them with excellent copies, which were at once distributed as seemed to them best, among the great cities—north, south, east, and west.

"She'll take to the big towns," Carnes had prophesied. "No need to look for her in the suburbs."

The whimsical fellow had conceived a dislike for this

unknown girl, second only to that which he felt for Larson.

"I'd wait and see if she were alive," retorted Stanhope, "before I settled myself to detest her. I shouldn't care to discover that I had been hating a dead woman."

"Oh, she's alive!" declared Carnes, "she's alive, and we're going to find her. When I have this sort of feeling, I always run down my game. It's a sort of bloodhound instinct."

"For heaven's sake, stop!" cried Stanhope testily. "First, Larsen's a human tiger, and now you're a bloodhound. The race is not always to the swift; have you classified Miss Warham, too, pray?"

"She's a panther!" cried Carnes; "a sleek, soft-stepping, velvety panther."

And now for a period of days, inaction seemed to have fallen upon all concerned in "the Warham Mystery," and Carnes fumed, while Stanhope pondered; and the chief of police kept an argus eye upon all who had been brought under surveillance. Only Patsy found his occupation onerous.

"If something don't happen soon," groaned this young sleuth, "I shan't have a leg to stand on. I wish Old Sharp and his shanty was dynamitered—that I does!"

Patsy was spending his days in the street, watching over the goings and comings about Sharp's agency, and reporting the same to his master faithfully each night.

It was after hearing one of these reports, that Carnes, sitting in his room with Stanhope and Captain B—opposite him, exclaimed with a contemptuous sniff:

"That man Sharp, confound him, is the most inveterate sensation hunter it's been my misfortune to have had dealings with. What does he expect to gain by con-

stantly agitating that 'Warham Mystery and Murder?' If Sharp knew what we know"—

Stanhope thrust his pen behind his ear, and looked up from his note-book in which he had been writing.

"It would make him happy," he said, "if Sharp knew that our chief of police, and detective Rufus Carnes knew more about Mrs. Warham and her visit to the city than any other person, and that she was murdered under their very eyes and noses, it would delight him. It was a thing that you could not foresee, and were in no wise responsible for; but you couldn't expect Sharp to see it in just that light. You can't afford to take him into your confidence at *this* stage of the game, old man. Let Sharp and his honor, the mayor, work the ground in their own way."

Carnes turned upon him in unaffected amaze.

"Look here, young man; are you gifted with second sight?"

"Not quite," laughed Stanhope, "but I happen to know that you have been asked to call upon Sharp and company—"

"Umph!"

"And that you went."

Captain B—turned toward Carnes.

"May we hear about it?" he asked.

"There's not much to hear. Sharp sent for me; he was very magnanimous; wanted me to co-operate with him, on my own terms; especially upon this Warham business. He does not know how much we are all in it. Of course, I declined."

"So I suppose. Did he show you his hand?"

Carnes laughed.

"I don't think it's made up—quite. Sharp has but one thing to go upon."

"What's that?"



"It's that ear-ring found in the dead woman's ear. He has visited all the pawn shops in the city, he and his men, scattering duplicate pictures. He has a notion that its fellow may turn up. His theory is, that the mysterious caller at the Avenue was some crook who palmed himself off for an officer, or something like that; that he decoyed the woman away to rob her, and murdered her to protect himself."

"Then he's looking for you, Carnes," said Stanhope, rising as if to go away; "and he thinks that want and your evil ways will sooner or later drive you to the pawn-shops. It's a fact that Sharp and his men are doing some real work; doing their best on this case. It would be a queer muddle if some of them should trace that mysterious visitor to you, eh, Carnes?"

The chief of police joined him in a laugh at the expense of Carnes, but the latter looked glum, and bit his under-lip.

"I don't think it's a laughing matter," he said. "I'm certain that Sharp, with his investigations, will get us into trouble, yet. It's lucky for us that they never knew down there at Warham's, what Mrs. Warham did when she came to the city. They don't appear to have been a very devoted couple. Mrs. Warham never wrote a line home. You know Sharp's men have been nosing about down there?"

"What have you heard?" asked Captain B—.

"Oh, Dick's heard. He's had a letter from his sweetheart, Susan."

"Yes," said Stanhope, unconcernedly, "Susan has reported progress. Sharp's men have not made much out of their journey. They found out that there had been a detective there, but Susan and the old man stuck to the text I gave them. When Sharp wants to find *me*, he will look for the law-student amateur." But the best is,

that they did not get an idea of the hand Larsen has played; since he showed so much 'sensibility', by going mad over the loss of Bertha, the Uptonites have fully acquitted him of blame or complicity in the affair; as for the relationship between Larsen and Mrs. Warham, that story did not get outside of the parlor, where it was told to Larsen first—even Susan does not know it."

"It's a queer state of affairs," murmured the chief. "It's as if we were battering our heads against one side of a blank wall, and Sharp and his men were flattening theirs against the other."

"With more damage to the heads than to the wall," supplemented Carnes, maliciously.

The next day Captain B— sent for the two detectives, and placed before them an anonymous letter.

"This document," said he, "came the day when I overhauled those hack-drivers and street angels; I thought it only another effort of somebody's to do something sensational. You know as a rule, I don't deal much in these unsigned things; experience has taught me that not one in fifty are of use or value. But this—well the fact is, I thrust it aside rather hastily to attend to those cabbies and then I utterly forgot it. This morning it tumbled out of a mislaid *note-book*, and it struck me that—perhaps—"

"This might be the one in fifty?" broke in Carnes.

"Well, I don't know—fact is, it took a sort of a hold upon me, and so I'm going to share the responsibility with you two fellows."

He took the letter from the desk, where he had placed it face uppermost, and removed its envelope.

"I don't think much of these things," he said, "still it contains a hint which may mean something. It's evident enough that the writer has disguised his hand and

very cleverly, too. Read it out, young man," and he put the letter into Stanhope's hand.

Stanhope read aloud the following words:

"CAPTAIN B—, Chief of Police. Sir:—The writer of this is a stranger, and upon the point of leaving this place. While not desirous of being mixed up in what may prove to be a double tragedy, he yet feels it his duty to inform you that, shortly before the disappearance, he was witness to a meeting between a young lady answering to the description of the missing Miss Warham, and a man whom she addressed as *Joe*, and who was the girl's discarded lover. They quarreled; there were threats from the man, and an appointment was made for another meeting in that same place. This place, called 'Death Rock,' should, in my opinion, be *thoroughly searched*. The lost girl *may* be found in the pool at the base of the rock. Placed upon the witness stand, the writer could say *no more*; therefore he deems his whole duty done when he signs himself—*A Friend to Justice*."

Stanhope finished the letter and laid it down in silence, glancing askance at Carnes, who was evidently excited.

"Where was that letter posted," asked the latter quickly.

The chief held out the wrapper, and when Carnes had deciphered the Roseville postmark, he spread out a map and speedily traced out the distance between that village and Upton.

"Close together," he said, "just as I thought. There's something in that letter,"—he turned suddenly upon Captain B—. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I sent for you," replied the captain, "to discuss that very question."



They were not long in deciding. Carnes declared his intention to see Death Rock, and it was settled that they visit Roseville together, himself and Stanhope.

"There's a river there," he said referring to the map, "and there must be *some* sort of fishing. We'll go as fishermen, and explore the Rock in the easiest manner by the river. You can keep track of Sharp, captain; and there's nothing else to keep us on duty here."

"I fancy," said Stanhope, who had been pondering while the others talked, "that we may think it best to stay a few days down there. If we do I shall run down to Upton; Susan may give us a hint about the same Death Rock."

That evening they were *en route* for Roseville, and the next morning saw them, with an ostentatious fisherman's outfit, occupying the very quarters lately vacated by Mr. Jermyn.

Roseville and Upton were less than twelve miles apart, but the two detectives were somewhat surprised to find that the people were very little interested in the fate of Bertha Warham or the murder of her step-mother.

"I tell ye what!" said Brace, of the "Roseville House," to his conjugal partner, on the day after their arrival, "them young fellers from the city may not ketch many *fish* but they'll jest about have a jolly good *loaf*, and if they keep on the way they're *goin'* they'll know about half o' Rosey before they've been here a week. Dredful sociable fellars; and not one bit stuck up."

"They may suit *you*, Brace," replied his better-half, "but I tell you *one* thing: You'll go fur enough afore you'll git anybody into them front rooms that'll be the *born* gentlemen that Mr. Jermyn was."

"Umph!" sniffed Brace. "A wimmin's man, that's what he was; s'pose his wife's keepin' him in a band-box by

this time;" and he went down to the office where his two guests were chatting volubly, and exchanging stories, piscatorial and other, with some of his habitual loungers, while Mrs. Brace grinned as she peeped into the lowest "bureau drawer," where a "pattern" of "sage green" silk reposed in rolls of tissue paper.

"They may be very fine fellers," quoth she. "But it'll be many a long day afore another boarder makes me a present like *that*."

"Well, Dick," said Carnes to his friend, when they were at last closeted in Mrs. Brace's "private settin' room," after their second night in Roseville. "Have we progressed *an inch*?"

Stanhope looked doubtful.

"These people are positively apathetic," he said contemptuously. "I've only found them awake and alive upon one topic, and that is *not* Bertha Warham."

"What is it?"

"Have you observed those two ornate and ugly dwellings upon the hills to the westward?" Carnes nodded. "Well, they contain the aristocracy of the town. A sort of royalty; and what they do, and whom they entertain, are the chief topics of interest, apparently. I gather, from half a dozen sources, that the story of the Warham troubles broke upon the town when the people were intently watching the doings of a house-party, on the Hills, very high society indeed, and the usual nine days of wonder were shortened, and the Warham troubles were extinguished, by the enormous interest taken in a very romantic and aristocratic courtship and marriage following very close upon the heels of the tragedy aforesaid. It won't be worth our while to linger *here*, Rufe. Let's explore Death Rock and then take some more direct steps toward enlightenment."

"That is, drop the fish-pole and apply the pump direct."

"Precisely."

"Wait a bit. Is there anything new and interesting among the Royal families, just now?"

"That's just it. Just now it appears that a rising son of one of the Hill nabobs has returned to his home quite unexpectedly and after a long absence, and it has just leaked out that he came for the sake of a pretty girl, poor but proud, the sister of the editor of Roseville's solitary newspaper. The commotion this has created at the Hills has communicated itself to the entire town."

Carnes got up and stretched himself.

"I don't see but that we *shall* have to get up a counter-commotion," he said. "Suppose we make our business *known* and try the open-handed dodge?"

Stanhope laughed. "Not quite yet," he said; "But to-morrow we will visit the Rock."

The next morning they went in a boat, taking Johnny Brace, half-grown, and in the matter of gossip, a true son of his mother.

It was Johnny who secured them a good boat, and they found him a fount of information, unsuspecting, and very useful.

Once at the Rock they were quick to see how easily it might have been made the scene of Bertha Warham's farewell to earth. They explored the bridle-path by which she might have come from her home, and found that at least two other paths through the timber might have brought Larsen to the same rendezvous. They satisfied themselves that no drowned girl lay at the bottom of the pool below the great Rock, and amid the lesser ones, submerged, and concealed in the depths of still water.

They found, too, the underground opening into which the water flowed silently and swiftly, as if drawn by some invisible, resistless, force.



It was puzzling, baffling.

"If the writer of that anonymous letter *meant* to put us upon an impossible scent," said Carnes as they were about to return to Roseville, "he could not have done better. If his story is true, and Larsen and the girl met there a second time—well, we might as well give it up *now*. A body thrown off that Rock *must* be drawn into that hidden stream, and may be floating somewhere in the bowels of the earth at this moment."

"Has it occurred to you," asked Stanhope, who had been very silent and thoughtful, "has it occurred to you that the object of the letter *might* have been just that?"

"Just *what*?"

"To puzzle us; we can't look for Bertha Warham beyond the pool at the foot of that Rock."

"True, and we can't help but see what a *probable* meeting-place it might be. They could come so easily and so secretly through the woods from Upton."

"Don't overlook the fact that one could come with equal ease from *Roseville*," said Dick.

They had been setting in the boat at the foot of the great boulder, and close to the group of sunken rocks which kept them from close contact with the mouth of the underground stream.

"Let's go back," said Carnes, and he pushed the boat away from its place with a sudden force which swung it about and brought them close under the great boulder, a little lower down.

On this side, the Rock jutted out over the water, and thick moss, and overhanging bushes, grew downward almost to the water's edge, and inward, to the very mouth of the watery opening; at that moment they were nearer this opening than they had been before, and so near the Rock that, by leaning forward, at some risk of a wetting, Stanhope caught and clung to an overhanging shrub.

"Push in," he said to Carnes. "This gives a closer view," and then he uttered a quick exclamation, and lifted himself until he stood with one foot upon the skiff's edge and one hand clinging to a shrub high above.

Then, suddenly there was a sharp exclamation from Carnes, a quick movement, a lurch of the boat, a splashing in the water. The next moment Stanhope emerged from his impromptu bath, drenched, but triumphant, grasping with one hand the side of the boat, and clutching in the other the fragment of shrub to which he had been clinging and to which something white was attached.

"I'm all right," were his first words. "Get to shore, Carnes, I want to see what I've captured."

A moment later, indifferent to his drenching, he was kneeling upon the mossy rock and spreading out before him the thing he had just detached from the fragment of shrubbery.

"A woman's kerchief!" exclaimed Carnes.

"Yes—and—by Jove, Carnes, *look!*" He held up the limp and weather-beaten bit of soft linen so that Carnes could see clearly the two letters embroidered across one corner.

"B. W.! *Bertha Warham!*" he cried.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### CARNES MISSES A CLUE

When they had regained the privacy of their rooms at the Roseville House, and Stanhope had donned dry garments, the two detectives fell at once into talk about the little handkerchief with the initials.

They had returned hastily from Death Rock, and the presence of Johnny Brace in the stern of the boat had kept them from discussing their find, while it had given them time to think it over, each for himself.

Now they spread it out upon the table between them and surveyed it once more.

"I'd give something to have seen that thing as it hung upon the bush, Dick," said Carnes thoughtfully. "Can you tell just how it was attached?"

Stanhope shook his head.

"I see what you mean, Carnes," he said; "but I can only tell that it seemed to rest among the leaves and little twigs, as if it had fallen there, not open and fluttering, but in a wrinkled mass as if from somebody's half-shut hand. I see what you think, Rufe, you think this is a 'fix,' but at any rate, the thing was not *displayed*; it would have been completely hidden if you had not pushed the boat into exactly that position; and *you* did not do it on purpose."

Carnes shook his head; "no," he said. "I meant to strike the rock further down."

"Yes; well, it could only have been seen from where



we were, or where I was then, and I could only see a tiny bit of dingy white, which I took for, perhaps, a scrap of paper. It might have fallen from the hand of someone at the edge of the Rock above, and lodged where I found it."

"It might?" echoed Carnes.

"Oh, I am by no means prepared to say it *did*, but one thing I mean to do. I'm going to take this bit of linen and show it to Susan, and I'm going to-day."

"Quite right," nodded Carnes. "But you've hit *my* notion, Dick; grant all that you say and throw in your ducking, and I still insist that we came upon this 'clue' *too easy*. It fits into that anonymous letter *too close*."

"True—and yet, suppose Susan identifies this handkerchief as Bertha Warham's, will that change your views?"

"It will *complicate* them," said Carnes, and would say no more.

That afternoon Stanhope secured a fleet young horse, and taking the road by the river, which in time brought him to the bridle-path through the woods and past Death Rock, he made his way quickly and quietly to the Warham place, and as quickly and quietly back again.

Susan was the first to see him riding up the long lane by which he approached the house from the river, and she was awaiting him at a side entrance when he entered the farm-yard and dismounted.

"Has any one else seen my approach, Susan?" were his first words as he took her hard but friendly hand; "my time is short and I only came to see *you*."

"John's asleep in his room," she replied with brevity matching his own, "and there ain't never a soul round this part of the place at *this* time o' day. These are the dairy and milk rooms, and I keep the keys. Come in," she pushed open the door at her back, and he followed her into the cool, clean dairy where she listened to his

brief account of the visit to Roseville, and the finding of the handkerchief.

At sight of the little square of cambric she caught her breath, and clutched at it with staring yes. "It's *hern*," she cried after a single glance, "she made them initials with her own two hands and a dozen more like 'em—she made 'em only a few weeks before she went away."

"What do you think of this Susan?"

"I don't *know*! It's mixed me all up again, this has. But I tell ye what, I don't want to think that that beast of a Joe Larsen was able to outwit that girl and kill her right here almost in hearin' of her own home. I won't believe it, till I have to."

"Do you think he wrote that letter then? as a decoy? perhaps." He had brought the anonymous letter for her inspection, and he now put it into her hand.

She took it and slowly labored through its contents, reading it a second time before she lifted her eyes from the page.

"Joe Larsen didn't write *that*," she said positively.

"You think not?"

"*Yes* sir. I ain't a scholar myself, but I ain't exactly a *fool* neether. Joe Larsen couldn't have writ that letter if he'd a tried ever so. He was too blunderin' and too coarse at his very *best*. If Lucretia—" she stopped short.

"If Lucretia—well, *what*, Susan?"

"I hadn't orto say it, may be—but I *was* goin' to say that if Lucretia Warham was alive *she* might have writ jist that sort of a letter. But not *Joe*."

"And you can't help me with an opinion about this handkerchief, Susan? Can't give a guess as to how it came there?"

"I tell you my idee's are all upset, what few I *did* have. But I won't believe that Bertha ever let herself be killed like *that*—by Joe Larsen."

"Yet you know this handkerchief to belong to her?"

"*Sure!* I'd swear to it anywhere."

Stanhope had not expected much from his visit to Susan, but he rode back to Roseville feeling unaccountably dissatisfied and baffled. He did not see John Warham, and he knew that the fact of his flying visit was a safe secret in Susan's care.

"It is what I looked for," was the comment of Carnes when Stanhope had reported his interview. "Susan can see the muddle this bit of linen has thrown us into. Look at it seriously, from any point of view, and it disarranges all our former theories and facts. I tell, you Dick, the more I look at it, the more I think that both the anonymous letter and identified kerchief were *meant* to nonplus and mislead us."

On the evening of this same day, Charley Brian and his sister were together in his office; Rene was looking impatient, and her brother, who had stolen an hour from his busiest afternoon to consult with a friend upon a very important personal matter, personal particularly to pretty Rene, was now hastening to complete a needed bit of copy for the next morning's issue.

"Tired of waiting, sis?" asked the young editor, closing his ink bottle and gathering up the scattered sheets of manuscript. "But I need not ask that, I suppose Ken *is* waiting. But you might have gone on "

"Without *you?* not to-night, Charl—how *could* you."

Brian laughed as he arose and stretched himself, "well I'm with you at last. The thing *did* seem outrageously long; put on your wraps. Puss," and he turned the key in the desk at his side and took his hat from its hook.

"Rat tat tat." Rene's face clouded instantly. "*Oh dear!*" she ejaculated and then catching her brother's arm



said, before he could call out the usual "come in:"

"Charl, if it's any one on business I *will* go on;" her brother nodded and called upon the visitor to enter. But his own face had clouded.

"I'll make short work of whoever it may be, sister," he half-whispered as the door opened slowly, and then he went forward to meet his visitor, while Rene slipped past them and out into the moonlight. Only a step however, then as someone confronted her and put out a hand with the assured air of a proprietor, she caught her breath, and then cried softly:

"Oh *Ken!* It is you! How could you?"

"How could I do what?" tucking her hand beneath his arm and turning away from the door.

"Bring that man. *Did* you bring him, Ken?"

"I don't understand, dear; I began to think something might be detaining Charlie, and I felt too impatient to wait."

"Oh," she murmured quite satisfied now; "you were right; some one, some odious stranger came in upon us just at the last moment; and so I left them there."

Charlie Brian was the most affable of editors, but tonight he greeted his visitor with a preoccupied countenance and a faint and frigid smile. He had worked hard all the day to enable himself to give a small portion of it, and the hours of the evening, to his friend Kenneth Baring, who had returned from New Orleans quite unexpectedly, and taken himself and pretty Rene, as well as the Barings upon the Hills, completely by storm. His visit was short, and he made no secret of his purpose. He had come a-wooing, and he meant to take the promise of Rene Brian back with him to the southern city where he was laboring hard to earn for himself a new name and build a new home independent of the Baring gold.

There was much to be said, for Kenneth prized, next

to the love of the sister, the friendship of the brother; and time was flying, for to-morrow he was to turn his face southward, after paying a flying visit to the city where he must investigate certain new inventions in surgery, for young Baring was studying medicine and surgery under the tutelage of one of the brightest and kindest masters of the healing art to be found in all New Orleans.

At another time perhaps, Rufus Carnes and Charlie Brian might have found in each other congenial spirits, but to-night the editor's thoughts were intent upon his sister and his friend, and Carnes appeared to him only as an intruder whom he must hear politely, and, if possible, dismiss speedily.

At any other time he would have felt and manifested more sympathy and interest in the fate of Bertha Warham and her step-mother, but to-night, with his mind full of his beautiful sister and her new happiness, the name of this other lost and wayward girl came as an unpleasant shock; he wanted to keep them apart, and to the end he felt that he must not go too deeply into the detective's business; he must not "let himself go."

He listened to Carnes' story; it was told briefly, with chill interest, and took the anonymous letter without comment. But when he had read it, he pondered a moment, and then read it again.

"Pardon me," he said, then, with less frigidity, and more interest, "may I ask just what you expect to learn from me—just what you suspect, or hope, from this inquiry?"

"My errand should be patent to you, I think; I want to find the author of this missive. I fancy he may not have told the whole story."

"But the letter says *distinctly* that the writer has gone."

"The man who writes an anonymous letter might well indulge in some fiction of that sort, to protect his incognito," said Carnes with a smile.

"Oh! and you think that the writer of this letter is still in Roseville?"

"I think it possible."

Brian glanced at the letter, which he still held, for the third time; then he handed it back to the detective.

"I wish I could help you," he said; "but I know of no one living in Roseville who, to my knowledge, ever knew, either this man Joe Larsen or Bertha Warham. The letter, to me, looks like a genuine, honest effort, to tell you the little known to the writer; and at the same time to protect himself from further trouble, or annoyance, in the case. You must admit that, to a stranger, one who may, at this time, be hundreds of miles away, the possibility of a legal summons, with all its attendant hinderances, its absolute business losses, perhaps, such a letter as this might have seemed a simple and easy way to tell all that he knew, to ease his conscience, and yet protect himself from those peculiar courtesies which the law sometimes pays a reluctant and innocent witness at a distance."

"And this is all you will say?"

"It is all I *can* say. As you have said, the writing is *disguised*, and *well* disguised. I cannot recognize it. I never saw this writing. It is my belief that it is an honest letter; that the writer has told you all that he knows."

Carnes stuffed the letter back into his pocket and arose.

"In my experience," he said, "an anonymous letter that is *honest* from first to last, that has nothing sinister, or tricky, in word or motive, that does not conceal more more than it tells, is a thing unknown." He took



his hat and moved back. "However, I see that I have your ultimatum; I shall get no further information from *you*." He paused for just a perceptible moment, and their eyes met; those of Carnes were full of meaning, while Brian's met them clear, calm, baffling.

"You *have* my ultimatum, certainly," he said, bowing his visitor out while he spoke. "Of anonymous letters I have had little experience."

So they separated, and Carnes went back to the little hotel, vexed and none the wiser, little dreaming that, for the first time he had been within a hand's reach of a promising clue.

Late that night, when Kenneth Baring had said his good-bye and gone away conqueror, leaving his fair betrothed at once happy and sad, and with no desire to go to her room, and to sleep, Brian, sitting beside her, weary yet willingly waiting her pleasure, and fully in sympathy with her mood, bethought him to tell her of his visitor.

Rene listened, in evident sympathy with the detective and his search.

"What a pity!" she said at the last. "How I *wish* you could have given him some help, some clue!"

Brian smiled.

"I could not," he said, "but if I am assured that you won't betray me to the detective, I will give *you*—a clue."

"A clue? *Charlie* Brian! Do you *know* who wrote that letter?"

"No, sis, I don't *know*. But I shrewdly guess that it may have been—"

"Whom?"

"It's to be a secret, mind."

"Of course! I shan't run out after this detective."

"Well, I think that our friend Jermyn, feeling anxious to put the little that he knows where it might

be of use, and yet more anxious not to be annoyed further, perhaps in the midst of his honeymoon, may have taken this way to enlighten the police. *I* call it very considerate in him. It is what I might have done myself—under like circumstances."

"Like circumstances! what do *you* know of the circumstances? do you mean to say that he saw—"

"He saw—something, and, considering all things, I think he deserves high praise. Even on his wedding-day he could not forget that he might say 'a word in season,' and help out justice."

Rene seemed to have grown suddenly sleepy.

"If you are going to extol *him*, brother mine, I will even hie me to my repose. Mr. Jermyn is capable of stranger things than these, mark me, sir."

The next morning saw the two detectives on their return journey, and by the same train went Kenneth Baring; all were smokers, and as Carnes was in an unsocial mood Stanhope after a time found himself next to young Baring and chatting freely with him. That two such natures should fraternize was a matter of course. Stanhope had witnessed Baring's farewell with Charles Brian, and knew him for a "Baring of the Hills," and Brian had pointed out Carnes to his friend and mentioned his visit of the previous night. After a few desultory remarks had been exchanged, Baring said: "If you will allow me to introduce myself, I would be glad to talk with you upon the subject which I understand has interested yourself and your friend here, to the extent of bringing you to Roseville. Do you prefer to keep yourself *incog*.—or—"

Stanhope broke in with a frank laugh, "excuse my interruption, Mr. Baring, you see I already know *you*. And for myself, I have no reason for desiring to hold

myself incog. *just now*, if I could. My friend and I have been looking into a little matter connected with the Warham affair, and there has been no especial attempt at secrecy; it's only in romance that you find the detective always posing as a mystery; an open course is often a winning one, in real life, and if you have any ideas to air, or if you know any of these parties—why, fire away, go ahead. I'm a good listener."

Baring laughed in his turn. "You take me up with a vengeance," he said. "I *knew* none of the parties, and I only saw Bertha Warham once, and that nearly four years ago, when she was hardly more than a child."

"Oh! Tell me about it; how did she impress you then? if at all."

"She *did* impress me, decidedly; it was at a party—a regular country merry-making. Probably she was the youngest girl there, certainly she was the prettiest, and she showed us a sample of her spirit that night."

"In what way?"

"I will tell you it, just as I saw it: I was standing with a group of young people, all chatting gayly while waiting for our various conveyances to be brought to the door; it was at the close of the party. It had chanced that I had not been presented to the little beauty; she was too fully monopolized to leave a chance for me; I was, in fact, a stranger, and looker-on. But she happened to be standing very near me, and was talking and laughing merrily, when a big fellow, muffled and ready for the road, made his way among us and we all knew, at once, that he was under the influence of liquor. He came close to Miss Warham and said very brusquely: 'Ready to go home?' Quick as thought she whirled about and faced him. 'I *am* ready to go home,' she said haughtily but not with *you!* *Stand aside!*' He was between her and the door, but he fell back as if



he were dazed, and the girl went past him, past all of us, like an enraged princess. She did not hasten, nor look to left or right. The fellow broke into a string of oaths, and someone half-led, half-dragged him into another room just as my companions called me with the others of our party."

"And did you never hear the sequel? or who the fellow was?"

"I think, without doubt, it was Larsen. Afterward I was told that he had pledged himself not to drink while in her company, and she had warned him what the result would be if he failed to keep his word."

"And that," said Stanhope in a murmuring tone, "was Bertha Warham in her early teens." Then, after a moment of silence, "and you never saw her again?"

"I never saw her again."

When the two parted upon reaching the city they shook hands warmly and Baring proffered his New Orleans address. "We may meet again," he said. "Perhaps some time I may even be of some use to you; at any rate, should you want to see me, this will tell you where to look me up."

And now began another period of vexation and tediousness for our friends Carnes and Stanhope. To visit Joseph Larsen, to watch Sharp and his men, to keep an eye upon everything and everybody in the remotest way connected with the Warham mystery, was all that seemed open to them; and with all their vigilance they could hit upon no new fact, possibility or hope. Bertha Warham's picture had been sent in many directions, and after a week or more letters of acknowledgment, letters accepting the commission and letters rejecting it, began to come in, but no one had seen Bertha Warham; no one could give news of her.

One of the first to reply to a letter which had inclosed one of the pictures of the missing one was a certain reporter resident in Philadelphia, and by name Luis Moses.

Mr. Moses' card had been given Stanhope by a city reporter who knew him in a business way, and it was Stanhope who had addressed him on the subject of the search.

Mr. Moses had received Mr. Stanhope's "interesting" letter and in any other way would be glad to oblige a gentleman "of whom he had heard so favorably," but he "must beg to be excused; under *no circumstances* could he so far stretch the limits of his profession as to lend a hand in the pursuit of a young woman, whatever her fault or crime." In his capacity of reporter for the "*Evening Hailstorm*," however, he would willingly, "*most* willingly," report the affair fully and completely when Mr. Stanhope should see fit to intrust him with a matter which of course he "looked upon, until otherwise informed, as a secret of the officers of the law."

And Mr. Moses was "Fraternally yours, etc., Luis Moses."

"That Jew is a fraud," pronounced Carnes contemptuously when Stanhope read him this letter. I'm willing to bet something that he is a reporter for what there is in it, and don't you forget it. I notice that he don't send back the picture of that 'young woman.'"

"I notice that they *all* forget to send back the 'young woman's picture,'" said Dick tossing the letter aside with careless indifference. "Well, Mr. Moses is only one little reporter in a city full of them, so we will thank him for the proffer of his reportorial pen, and say good-bye to him."

But they had not heard the last of Mr. Luis Moses.

Almost a month had passed since the arrival of his

polite refusal to overstep the limits of his profession when a second letter came and was at once recognized by Stanhope as from Mr. Moses.

He opened it with an air of indifference, which changed to a look of interest as he scanned the page, and a perusal of the whole sent him off in hot haste in search of his friend.

Mr. Moses' second letter was very unlike his first.

"*My Dear Mr. Stanhope,*" so it began in a neat and very lady-like hand, neater, if that could be, than was the first. "Since writing you last a strange thing has happened; I have seen the lady of whom you are in search, *I am sure of it*, and my eyes are very good ones. Upon reflection I decide that I may have mistaken my duty in this case. In explanation of my change of conduct, will only say here that, in thinking of the young woman you wish to find, I pictured her as poor, hunted, oppressed perhaps.

"The lady who answers perfectly to your description and is the counterpart of the picture, *I saw in an opera-box*, dressed in satin, loaded with diamonds, surrounded by a gay party of friends. I think you will do well to come on, for although I could not trace her home, I hope through some member of the party with which I saw her, to find out everything you may wish to know; more it would be unwise to write, but under the changed circumstances, I am *yours to command*,

"LUIS MOSES."

Having listened to the reading of this, Carnes once again volunteered an opinion of Mr. Moses.

"That Jew has almost showed his hand. He's a sheeny, and he scents a fat 'settler' from somebody. You'll have to go, Dick, but look out for Sheeny Moses."



Stanhope laughed. "I'm greatly obliged to Sheeny Moses, if he puts me upon anything like the ghost of a track; I won't ask *him* to strain his tender conscience, once he puts me upon the trace of my lady. Don't be too hard upon the fellow, Rufe; these 'literary consciences' are tender things."

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### "SHEENY" MOSES

Already Stanhope was feeling elated: He had wearied of the dull round of watching and waiting, and welcomed anything that should set him in motion once more. The first train outward bound for the east that evening carried Stanhope still a dapper young man, though not the dapper young man that his best friends knew, to Philadelphia.

He found Moses without difficulty, but the first look into the face of the soft-spoken, deprecating little Jew, told Stanhope that all was not well with his quest.

Clearly Mr. Moses had not looked for so prompt and personal a reply to his second letter, and his first words of welcome tripped, and fell over each other, a mass of confusion.

Moses was the typical Jew, with the difference that he affected *not* to be one, and upon all possible occasions ignored his nationality and his brethren.

He was overwhelming with his regrets and apologies, and he poured out the story of his two letters, regardless of question or comment.

Briefly, this was the story—Mr. Moses did not tell it briefly:

He had chanced to be at the opera on a certain night when all the world was out, and he had been ushered into an especially cozy corner of a box, which, on this night, an opening night, had been reserved for members of the press. Opposite him and clearly in sight, was a

party; several gentlemen were in the box, and *three* ladies. One of these ladies was a large, plump, "German-looking" blonde; the second was a little girl, neither blonde or brunette. And the *third*—well, at first glance Mr. Moses was startled. Then he remembered that he had with him at that moment, "quite by chance," the picture sent him by Mr. Stanhope; he compared the picture with the third lady and was more than ever startled; he had not thought of looking for Mr. Stanhope's missing girl among the elite of the city, and yet, he was so amazed, the resemblance was so *strong*, that he had lost his head; that was really his only explanation for his heedless, hasty summons. He had really believed, *at the time*, that he could *find* this lady again and that she was the original of the picture.

"And you wish me to understand that you have *not* found her?" Stanhope managed to thrust in at this point.

"Alas, Meester Stanhope, if you 'ad not left the ceety so sutten after *reeting* my letter. For I wrote again, a third time, and tolt you how it was."

"How it was? according to your second letter it was to be quite simple and easy; you were to trace the lady through one of the men in the box with her; someone you know."

"My cracious, *deed* I say such a thing as that?"

"Something very much like that."

"Oh! I *moost* of peen vild." Mr. Moses' accent of the fatherland increased with his excitement, and fell from him as he grew calmer. "Just vait; let me tell you apout how it all vas."

"Go on, then," curtly.

"As I said, I was sure it vas the original of the picture and after I had looket and looket, till I felt yet more sure, I began to look over -the gentlemen; there



were four or five, and one of them I recognizet not as an *acquaintance*, but as a man I had seen often at the Arcate; I knew him as a regular luncher there, and a frequent tiner, and I felt sure I could approach him and find out the name of the lady; you see?" he finished eagerly. He had begun deliberately, like one who knows what he is about to say. But Stanhope's steady eye, resting upon his face with cynical sternness, seemed to cause him uneasiness.

"I—see, ahem!—yes."

"Vell, the next day early, I went to the Arcate, and sat there till lunch time and waited. He didn't come, and I went there for dinner; next day I tried aken," he was playing with his dangling watch guard and could no longer meet the detective's eye. "But all day he neffer showed himself; then I got around the waiter that often stoot at his table and asked about him just as if I knew him—who he *was*, you know. *Vell*, sir, what to you think?" He gave himself a nervous shake and jumped up from his chair.

"Never mind what I *think*—finish your story."

"Well sir the gentleman had left town pefore daylight on the *ferry* moment after I had seen him hat the opera."

"Really! did the lady go with him?"

Mr. Moses blushed scarlet. "Sir!" he spluttered, "do you toubt me, sir?"

"*Doubt* you. Oh, *no*. Is that the end of your story?"

"The gentleman being gone, I had no other way of finding out about the lady, and then I wrote at once—to you."

"Thanks—*very* much;" Stanhope arose like one whose business is at an end. "Now, I'll trouble you to return me the photograph of the missing lady. It might cause you another troublesome surprise should you retain it."

The reporter started visibly, and was silent a moment;

then he said; "I'm sorry really, but really, the truth is, I was so disgusted when I found myself so *passled* that I tore the picture to pieces and threw them into the waste-basket."

"*Indeed!* then, Mr. Moses, I will wish you good morning; possibly *I* may succeed better in finding this lady," and, much to the reporter's surprise, he turned and walked away without so much as a backward glance. Moses stared after him a moment and then struck his stubby fist upon the table at his side.

"Damn him!" he muttered; "I wonder what the fellow is going to do."

For two days Stanhope was very busy. On the morning of the third he appeared again before Mr. Moses.

This morning the reporter was quite himself—at first. He received his guest volubly and proffered him the best of his two shabby bedroom chairs.

"Thank you—no," said Stanhope. "I am leaving the city this morning, and my errand is brief. It is only a little caution I wish to give you; and it may need a few words in explanation; when I came here, in answer to your letter, and heard your little story, I was a trifle puzzled to know precisely where the fiction began, and surmised it to be very near *the beginning*. Now I never leave a little simple conundrum like that—quite within my humble reach—unsolved, unless matters more important intervene; so I set out at once to look up and pull to pieces your bits of patchwork—.

"Really, sir—" began the reporter.

"Don't interrupt me, please; you have already occupied too much of my time. Well, sir, I find that you *did* see a lady resembling closely the lady of the photograph which you so foolishly destroyed, and that your description of the entire party was correct. I am also

informed that you *did* make an effort to learn, from the ushers and the managers, the identity of the lady."

"Oh!—" again began Moses.

"Exactly. The ushers could remember nothing; they were new to the city, as was also the manager—"

"Yes, yes."

"Yes. I also traced you to the Arcadia, and here our experiences, your report and my investigation cease to agree."

"Vat—*vat?*" the reporter's face flushed darkly.

"Don't excite yourself. I chanced to find a waiter who, while he did not know the name of your friend of the opera-box, knew he was an habitual diner. He recalled distinctly your conversation with him, for a very good reason; he was idle at the moment, and, after seeing your approach, the meeting was fixed in his memory by seeing the gentleman, who was about to dine, *send back his dinner*, and arise and go out *with you*—" Stanhope moved a step forward, and his tone became stern:

"Now, Mr. Moses, *what* is your little game?"

"*My* came! Goot heavens! I tell you, sir; this is a *meestake* entirely. I did *not* see the man; your vaiteer is all wrong. He has meestook me for somepoddy else!"

"Don't waste words, Moses; that waiter has taken a good look at you and is ready to swear to you."

"Put I say *no!* I tells you—"

"You may *say* anything. Now, my friend, in my profession I have learned a little about the human countenance, and I read in yours, secretiveness and obstinacy of a certain kind, together with certain other, not very lovely traits. You do not intend to tell me the truth of this matter. I did not expect it of you. You have something at stake; have already accepted a bribe, doubtless; for, know, my friend, your friend of the restaurant *has* disappeared; I have learned so much. And now



Mr. Moses, although you did not intend it, you have done me a service. You have put me upon a trail which may lead to much; as a repayment I will give you a word of advice and warning: Don't have any more shady dealings with this gentleman of the opera-box, for—really I felt that I must—I have just mentioned your little transaction with me to the chief of police, and you will be very carefully looked after. There, don't get in a rage; you will not be annoyed so long as you hold to a straight course; but don't fall into any little temptations, and do not seek further for the missing lady—leave that to *me*."

Homeward-bound and lounging luxuriously in the palace sleeper of the fast westward mail, Stanhope mused and chuckled to himself.

"Perhaps I was a bit rough on the poor little reporter," he said to himself. "Really he has done well by me, whatever he might have intended. He has given me a brand-new clue to follow, and waked up a very queer train of ideas. I must talk them over with Carnes right away."

But he did not. Upon reaching home, he found that the "Warham Case" had turned a new leaf in its history, thanks to Sharp & Company.

He also found a telegram from New York which said:

*"Found a starter, come on."* JONES.

At midnight he was on his way to New York.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### FOUND A VICTIM

"Get up out of that corner, Tim, and stir yourself! how you can sleep like a cat or a pig in such a hot place as that I don't see! right in the blazing sun! Get me some chips, or something to start the kettle with; here comes our white-faced drunkard."

They called it a home, the people who occupied it—a little tumble-down frame building, originally intended perhaps for a small—a very small stable—but converted by the march of progress and the needs of the poor, into a dwelling—such a dwelling! Two tiny rooms with one window in each, a door of entrance at the front, a connecting door and a door of exit at the back. Such furniture! a rickety table, a few broken-backed chairs, some fragments of crockery, a bed, old, and scant, and ragged, in the rear room, and no covering for the floors, save a plentiful overlay of dirt.

The woman who spoke was of middle age, unkempt and squalid, but with an evident attempt at youthfulness visible through the rags and dirt. The boy, who looked like a very vicious little Italian, scrambled to his feet and began to dig his eyes with his knuckles.

"Ye're always wantin' somethin'," he whined. "I can't never git no sleep!"

"That you can't, in broad daylight. *I* don't sleep."

"I allays wants to sleep when I'm hungry;" howled the boy, "and I'm awful hungry now."

"Well well! Charley's comin', don't I tell you, and

ain't I goin' to boil the kettle, if ever you get the chips? rustle now!"

As the boy went out through the door of exit, a bumping, thumping sound came from the door of entrance, and the woman opened it with a jerk.

"Oh it's you, good-for-naught," she said, as a man stumbled up the one step that led into the room. "I thought you had left the country, or found some rich relations; where have *you* been?"

She made an effort to call up an affectionate smile, but it was only a wink, and the man did not seem impressed by it.

"There's not much use in coming to *you*, Fan, with a hole in one's pocket. It's only desperate lonesomeness that's brought me now."

"Lonesomeness! Charlie Jenkins, do you mean to tell me that you're *broke*?"

"That's what I mean," said the man surlily. He was younger than the woman by at least ten years, and although dissipation and hardship had wrought havoc with a face that might have been handsome, even aristocratic, his speech and manner yet retained some traces of refinement.

The woman sat down and looked at him fixedly; he had already dropped heavily upon a chair in the corner farthest from the window.

"Charlie Jenkins," she said severely, "do you know that there is not a mouthful in this house?"

"I have not eaten a mouthful since yesterday noon," he said by way of answer.

"Well you've found something to *drink*, that's evident enough. I suppose you paid your last dime for whisky."

"Yes," he assented. "My last dime."

They were a pair of social outlaws. The woman had



been, in her youth and far into maturity, a rider in the circus arena, and later, a driver in the 'Roman Chariot' races, but she had not been prudent, and now, in her poverty—for at her time of life, to live by her wits, as she did, meant poverty—she could only console herself by looking back over the path she had trod, regretting that those halcyon days were gone; for that they were halcyon days, and that life in the arena was the best life to live, she never for one moment doubted. In some way the boy Tim, a homeless waif upon the street, had drifted to her door, and she had taken him in and made him useful; she had even dreamed wildly of training him, and taking him "upon the road" as a little athlete. But Tim was not teachable; he developed a talent for the consumption of bread and molasses, and dutch sausage, and confined his gymnastic exercises to the street; and his mistress, in a fit of economy and disgust, was about to turn him adrift, when she fell sick, and found in little, cross Tim her only earthly friend. They almost starved together, but she did not again threaten the boy with exile. She first saw the man whom she affectionately called the white-faced drunkard, at the top of a flight of steep stairs, that led up outside of the building, to the second floor of an abandoned warehouse, close by her domicile. He was very drunk, and was swaying to and fro upon the tiny platform at the top of the stairs; while she gazed, wondering how so tipsy a fellow ever managed to climb that steep flight, and interested to know how he would get down, when he illustrated his method by staggering, toppling, clutching at the rotten railing, which broke beneath his weight, and falling headlong straight into the mud of the alley below.

"A sober man would have broken his neck," said the *ex-equestrienne* when she, with Tim, ran out to his assistance. "We'll have to take him in, Tim; there's no

one else to do it;" she had noted even as he lay there in the mud, that his face was prepossessing, and his clothes although shabby, well made and of good quality.

They took him in, and from that day their queer friendship dated. He told her that he was a drunkard and a total wreck, and that she might call him Charlie if she liked, which she did, and as he had not provided her with another name, she christened him Jinkins, in a facetious mood, and fell into the habit of calling him "Mr. Charlie Jinkins," when she wished to be emphatic.

It was upon the pocket of Mr. Charlie Jinkins, that they now mainly depended for their comforts, and of late, the appearance of hunger, and of Charlie Jinkins was not always simultaneous. As she sat before him, looking at him so steadily, a sickly half-smile flitted over his face, which was ruddy when sober, pale when half-drunk, and ashen when wholly intoxicated. They were both hungry, but they were both good-natured.

"Charlie Jinkins," she said slowly, "you make me tired! where are all your heir-looms?"

"Spouted."

"*All?*"

He reddened and looked about him uneasily. "Where's Tim?" he asked.

"Gone out after chips."

"I've got just *one* thing left, Fan," he said with great show of drunken caution, "just one thing, an' I kind o' hate to part with it. It's awfully unsafe for a fellow like me to go to a pawnshop with anything valuable."

"Why, you didn't kill anybody to get it did you?" she asked contemptuously.

The man turned ashen pale. "Don't you talk like that, Fan," he said resentfully. "I—I don't like it."

She drew her chair toward him, and passing by his remark, said coaxingly: "Come, Charlie, what have you

got? I'll risk the uncles; say now, I know just where to go. I'll go with you; we can't *starve*, Charlie Boy."

She leaned toward him and gave his hand a caressing pat.

"Fan," he took her hand and held it while two maudlin tears crept down his cheeks, "Fan, you're the only friend I've got. You've been like—like—"

"Like a grandmother, haven't I, Charl—, well now, don't let your grandmother starve."

"I won't," he said huskily, and letting two more big tears escape, while he began fumbling about his person. "I'll take this, Fan," he drew forth a small thing wrapped in many papers, and put it in her hand.

She began at once to pull off the papers and then uttered an exclamation as she held up to view a lady's earring, large and heavy, with a setting of genuine Cameo.

"It's *good!*" "she cried; "it's real good! and a beauty too! why, Charlie!"

This last was an exclamation of remonstrance; he had struck down the hand which held the jewel aloft, and was holding it covered with his own.

"Don't do that," he said. "You mustn't—mustn't let any one see."

"I'll let old Moss see, and pretty quick too," she cried, jumping up and beginning to put on a shabby hat and faded shawl.

"Ah, Charlie, if we could only afford to haggle, but we can't; we want to eat. Come along, you needn't be afraid of old Moss. *He* never asks questions. I'll go to the alley with you and wait outside."

"The alley!" ejaculated the man getting up and balancing himself upon his legs, "it's always an alley! Once upon a time I didn't know what an alley was. Come along, Fan."



## CHAPTER XL

### THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

The *ex-equestrienne* stooped and picked up his dilapidated hat, which he had dropped upon the floor, and as she arose her eye caught the moving figure of Tim in the rear room; he was standing at the door of exit, with a hand upon the latch. He might be just going out, or just coming in.

"Tim," she said sharply, "have you just come?"

"Umph!"

"Where are your chips?"

"Couldn't find 'um," said Tim beginning at once to whimper. "You allus think I can find everything."

"No, I don't, but I think you can eat all *I* can find. Since you are in you can stay in, until we come back; we're going after some supper. Come, Charlie."

When they were gone, the boy Tim came softly into the front room, and looked out of the window, then slipped quietly out through the door of exit, and dodging and ducking warily, followed Charlie and his mistress. Poor little Tim, his is the errand of Judas; with his dirty little fists clinched in the pockets of his ragged jacket, his small old face fairly wolfish in its intensity and greed, as he runs, dodges, starts, stops, always keeping an eye upon the pair who hurry on unconscious of his nearness, he is the embodiment of malice, avarice, greed. But he embodies also the sins of a profligate father, an unloving and inhuman mother, whose own hand cast him a waif upon the street, and of the care-

less philanthropy, the lukewarm christianity, the indifference, the intolerance, the inhumanity of his fellow-man.

Poor little Tim! When you stand at the throne of justice, before those eyes that mark even the sparrow's fall, to answer for the sins of a desolate childhood, you shall not stand alone; and the voice that speaks from the throne shall say unto those who might have rescued you—yet passed you by—"Inasmuch as ye did it not unto the least of these my little ones, ye did it not to me."

Moss the pawnbroker was perched upon a high stool in his little dingy den, at the back of a still dingier shop, when Charlie Jenkins entered. The visitor's hat was drawn well down over his face, and he seemed in haste; the walk had sobered him somewhat, but his hands trembled, as he passed his little packet over the narrow counter, and asked for a loan upon it.

The pawnbroker took it and unrolled the paper in which it was carefully wrapped; there was a dingy calico curtain inclosing three sides of his den, opening upon a little box-like place upon either side, lined with close narrow shelves, which were the receptacles of the smallest and most valuable pawns; such light as they had came from above, except when, on very dark days, the old pawnbroker lighted upon each side a sputtering tallow candle.

He had unrolled the paper slowly, and with an air of languid indifference, and had just dropped his eye upon the jewel it contained, when he started quickly and uttered a sharp "What's that!"

Charlie started too, and looked about him apprehensively. He had heard no sound and could see nothing around him. When he looked back through the pawnbroker's window Moss had disappeared. Only for a moment

however, then he was back and clambering again upon his stool.

"Them rats is the plaik of my life," he said, as if in apology. "My lantlort says tey are only mice, put I know petter. Them lantlorts is a bad lot."

As Mr. Moss was his own landlord, this remark was not so uncharitable as it seemed. And this fictitious landlord was the "Mrs. Harris," who had helped the wily pawnbroker over many difficult conversational chasms. During his moment behind the curtain, Mr. Moss had found time to scrutinize the jewel closely, and to hold it up and compare it with a small photograph that was tacked upon one of the upright shelf supports. It was the photograph of an ear-ring, the counterpart of that which he held in his hand.

When he was again upon his stool, Mr. Moss returned to business.

"Let me see," he had labored diligently to eradicate his Jewish accent, and he lapsed into it only at times when excitement hastened his speech. "Let me see, you want a loan on this; what is it?" he opened his grimy hand which had inclosed paper and jewel and laid them before him upon the counter. Then he shut one eye and seemed absorbed in contemplation of the proffered pawn. Again he threw up his head, uttered a sharp "Hey!" hopped down from his stool, and disappeared, this time behind the curtain in the rear. This curtain concealed a door, the upper half of glass, and behind this door he could see, in a little dirty back room, a frowzy and fat Jewess reading a ragged and much-fingered novel, and a boy, a youthful counterpart of Moss himself, sitting upon the floor, engaged in teaching a lean dog to shake hands.

"Mose," whispered the pawnbroker, coming in cautiously and softly closing the door. "Mose, you remember Sharp?"





“YOU WANT A LOAN ON THIS. WHAT IS IT?”—Slender Clue, p. 402.



The boy nodded.

"I want you to go to him as fast as you can; tell him I've found the mate to the ear-ring, and to send some men quick. Hurry, Mose!"

"I haf everything to do," he explained when he again climbed upon his stool; "my boy that minds effery things outside is gone away."

He looked at the jewel again and then blandly across at the man waiting with evident anxiety.

"This looks goot," he said; "it looks first-rate; how much for it?"

"All I can get," said the hungry fellow.

"Oh, well, if you want a close pargain, I hove to test this; if it is really good it's worth something. 'Twill take only a few minutes; if you like you might come inside and sit down; customers sometimes don't like to come in when they sees anyone in the store; maybe you'd better."

He indicated by a sign the little half-door just beyond the dingy lower curtain, and went to open it, ushering the hungry, half-dazed Charlie into his den, with a grin and an inward chuckle; it was literally the spider and the fly.

When he had seated his fly upon a backless old chair, the spider began his test; it took bottles of queer colored liquids, several odd-shaped glasses, and some tiny brushes.

Moss tested by a method of his own, promptly originated for the emergency, and for every one of these articles he had to hunt first behind one curtain, then behind the other; it was a very slow process, and the poor fly grew restless; he had no suspicion of the part the spider was playing, but he thought of the woman waiting for him around the corner, and he fancied her black eyes were beginning to snap.



Finally, when the spider dared no longer keep up his pretense, he turned to the fly, rubbing one hand softly over the other.

"I find that very good material," he said, smiling blandly. "Have you got its mate?"

Charlie shook his head and muttered something about its mate being lost.

"Oh, ah! It's too bad, too bad, such a nice piece of family jewelry; of course you will want to redeem it? or—will you sell? I wouldn't mind if I buy it right out, eh!"

"How much," muttered the fly.

"Well, really, maybe I could give you three dollars for that."

"Not enough," said the fly sullenly.

"Not enough? well may be I hadn't better buy."

He took up the trinket again, held it up to the light, and began a dissertation upon the woes of pawnbrokers. He consumed fully five minutes in this way. Finally he said: "Well, I'll give you five dollars."

The other got up and put out his hand.

"Give it to me," he said.

The spider opened a drawer and began to fumble and peer. "Well, I never saw such luck," he finally said. "I haf not five dollars in change. Only a ten bill. Wait, I'll run out my back door and git some change." Then he went to the curtain in the rear and bawled:

"Sarah!"

They heard a door open and shut, and then the frowzy woman put her head between the curtains.

"Sarah," said the spider, "you just come in ant mint the shop. I've got to go after some change."

The spider went out and Sarah came in, and the poor, fly, glad that the bargain was done, sat in the web and patiently waited.

## CHAPTER XLI

### CIRCUS FAN "GETS EVEN"

The *ex-equestrienne* waited near the corner until waiting became tedious. She grew first restless, then impatient, and last thoroughly angry.

What was Charlie doing all these moments? surely not haggling over the price of that ear-drop! It was not like Charlie to keep her waiting. She walked a short distance in one direction, and then a short distance in the other, looking back now and then and careful to keep within sight of the pawn-shop door.

A second time she repeated this walk, then as she turned for the third time, she saw coming toward her a familiar figure, the figure of the pawn-broker's boy Mose. Two men were walking close at his heels, and all were moving toward her rapidly, the boy almost running, the men taking long strides.

"Mose," she put out her hand as the boy was about to pass her, but he darted aside, and turning his head toward the men made them a significant gesture over his shoulder and ran ahead.

The woman halted and stood looking after him until he had disappeared within the pawn-shop, then she started in the same direction—only a few steps, however, and she halted again, a look of anxiety overspreading her face. The two men who were close at the heels of the boy had also entered the pawn-shop.

There was something in their manner as they stopped, exchanged a word or two, and then went boldly in, look-

ing neither up nor down the street, that carried conviction to the mind of the waiting woman: their gait and brisk air of business; the look of Mose, and his significant gesture—something had happened to Charlie Jenkins.

And then it all made itself clear to her—Charlie's strange manner, his reluctance to pawn the jewel, his reticence, his nervousness, his air—which until his pocket became empty she had thought and cared little about—of having always something to conceal; she was old in the ways of the world and its wickedness, and although she had little conscience she had great caution.

In the six months that their friendship had endured, the lonely, friendless unfortunate had formed an odd attachment for the luckless drunken wight who had fallen into her hands; he was always amiable, always generous; and there still clung about him a remnant of refinement and respectful courtesy, that was very pleasant, quite novel and interesting, to the woman whose life had known little of these graces.

"Charlie Jenkins has seen better days," she was fond of saying to herself and to little Tim. But when she questioned him about his past, and her tongue was bridled by no scruples of delicacy, he sometimes smiled, sometimes let fall a maudlin tear; but he never gave her a satisfactory answer.

Tempering her friendship with caution, she loitered past the pawn-broker's door, peering in as she passed; but nothing was visible through the begrimed "half-windows," and no sound could be heard from within. She went slowly to the street corner, crossed over, and began a slow promenade up the other side. As she came opposite the place of interest, the door flew open, and the boy Mose dashed out and away; but the woman now manifested no desire to overtake or question him. She stopped and looked in at some dingy shop windows, and



so made her way slowly to the farthest corner; here she paused, clapped her hand to her empty pocket, and went through, for the benefit of any chance observer, with a little pantomime of dismay; then she turned sharply, and went slowly back; with her eyes searching the pavement, like one who has lost something.

When she was again half-way down the block, a hack came rapidly around the nearest corner, and drew, rattling up before the door of the pawn-shop with Mose upon the box beside the driver. The boy swung himself down and vanished behind the low door, which opened again in a moment, for the two business-like men who were now more business-like than at first, and between them, writhing, struggling, beseeching, half-led, half-dragged, was Charlie Jenkins.

When the two men with their prisoner had entered the carriage and driven away, the woman crossed the street with a firm step and entered the den of the spider.

Already the frouzy woman had gone back to her novel, and the spider was sitting at his desk, leaning his chin upon his hand, and smiling into vacancy like one who, for once, has done his duty, and finds the contemplation of the deed surprisingly pleasant.

He raised his head as the sound of swift heels approached his curtained lair, and started slightly at sight of the woman Fan.

"Moss," she said sharply, "I've done you a good turn before now, and I want you to do me one, and not lie nor waste any words. You know me pretty well; I don't believe you want me for your enemy."

"Why, my dear," quavered Moss apprehensively, "what's gone wrong?"

"Nothing," said Fan shortly; "only I want some information. Who was that man that was taken out of here, and who were the men who took him?"

"Why, my dear—" began the spider.

"Moss, I haven't two minutes more to waste on you. Out with it."

"My dear," quavered the old rascal, "I'm very willing to tell you; I don't know who the man was, but he brought me an ear-ring like one that Sharp and his men are looking after. I had my orders, and I didn't dare trifle with Sharp and his men; I'm telling you the truth; I sent my Mose to Sharp's, and he sent two men to take the fellow away."

"What was the charge against him?"

"O, gracious! I don't know."

"Moss," she said contemptuously, "it's my opinion that you lie. But never mind that; you'll oblige me with the loan of a dollar, won't you?"

"Why, Fan—why yes, to be sure! *one* tollar, yes."

"I'll settle with you, you old reprobate!" muttered the woman as she went swiftly homeward. "All in good time I'll show you what it is to cross the path of Circus Fan!"

And she did; circumspect even in her rage, she waited a week, then she scrawled the following note and sent it to Station A.

"If the police are anxious to know where some of the goods stolen from B— & Co., K—street, K—'s jewelry house, and other places lately robbed, are concealed, let them go to *Moss the pawnbroker's*, on 'Black alley' near the old Vicks Theater, search behind the curtains *for the trap in the floor*.

ONE WHO KNOWS."

As the result of this missive, Moss, who had long been an object of suspicion, was visited, the trap discovered, a large quantity of stolen goods identified, the pawnshop closed, and the spider thrown into prison to await a long and tedious process of law.

Fan and the officers had done their work swiftly and well, but justice—American justice—alas! too often is lame and halt and well nigh blind.

## CHAPTER XLII

### AN EMBRYO JUDAS

The boy, Tim, knew little of Sharp and his agency, but he knew where Captain B—'s headquarters were situated, and he had even struck up a gamin's acquaintanceship with some of the captain's good-natured men, especially with the young man, Felix, who loved to chaff the quick-witted, crusty little misanthrope.

During his turbulent little life, Tim's one pleasure and relaxation, the only pleasure to be had by such as he, without money and without price, had been looking and listening.

Other boys of his age followed the bands, the circus parades, the march of societies, the fire-engines, and even began to take, in saloons and on street corners, their first lessons in ward politics. Tim, indeed, in a time of dearth, might indulge mildly in these delights, but they were not his chiefest. Better than all of these more or less cheerful spectacles, Tim loved to peer into ambulances and prison vans, to hang about police courts, to stand packed into the crowd that constitutes the "ragged edge," let in or shut out as might be, at a coroner's inquest. Better than all these he loved to follow a body to the morgue, and to watch and listen, as he hung about that awful place.

As yet his political instincts lay dormant, but he could listen for hours to the lounging gossipers who talked chiefly of murders, suicides, assaults, and all manner of malodorous sensations. It was owing to information



gleaned for the most part from his attendance at the morgue, and his attention at the street corners, that Tim was now scampering over the pavements, bent upon delivering some of his "useful knowledge" into the hands of Captain B—.

It happened that the chief of police was absent that morning, and Felix, acting as deputy, sat behind his desk.

"There's a kid out here that says he knows you," said a man coming into the office and addressing Felix. "He asked for the captain first—says he's got something important to tell."

"Oh! bring in the young informer, Johnny; I dare say he's one of my bosom friends."

"Hello!" he ejaculated when Tim, still panting and red in the face, appeared before him. "It's *you* is it, youngster? What's on *your* mind? The last time I saw you, you were counting the carriages in a funeral procession. How many were there, you festive youngster?"

Tim scowled and dug his knuckles into his eyes.

"That was day afore yisterday," he said surlily, "an' there was only sixty-five; I guess if *you* lived with Circus Fan you'd be about as festive as I be."

"I shouldn't wonder," answered Felix, his eyes twinkling; "I guess I won't change places with you, Tim." Then suddenly remembering his official dignity, "what's wanted, my boy?"

Tim drew nearer and assumed a look of solemn mystery.

"Ye know the woman that was murdered in the alley, much as four months ago, I guess?"

"Do you mean the Warham murder, Tim?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Well that happened nearer five months ago, near the first of May—this is September."

"Wall, that's the one. There was a ear-ring on the woman, an' the perlice wanted to find the t'other one."

"That we did, 'Tim. Well, go on."

"What do I git if I tell ye where to find that other un?"

Felix came down from his desk and seized the boy's shoulder in no gentle grip.

"You'll get something you won't like if you come here with any cock-and-bull story about such a matter as that, youngster. If you really know anything, you had better out with it, short meter."

"Lem me go," whined Tim, writhing out of his hand, "confound ye, somebody's allus yankin me around cos I'm little."

"That's all right, boy. What about that ear-ring?"

"Wall, I've jist seen it."

"Where?"

"Down where I live. Circus Fan's."

"In her possession?"

"No. I seen Charlie Jenkins' show it to her; she sent me after chips, an' I got tired and come back to see if there was any show for grub. They didn't hear me come in, an I seen him show it to her, an they even planned to take it to an uncle. Fan said she knew a good one. I knowed it the minute I set eyes on it; I've heard it pictured out lots o' times an' I seen a fotygraff of it too."

"Oh, you have! now then tell us about this Charlie Jenkins. What is he anyhow?" Whereupon Tim gave his version of the history of "Charlie Jenkins," as far back as his knowledge extended.

When his story was done, Felix was silent so long that the boy grew impatient.

"Say, boss," he said ruefully, "warn't there a reward promised in this ere business?"

"Yes," said Felix absently.

"Wall I wisht I had some of it; I—I'm awful hungry," and Tim began to cry for sheer self-pity.

Felix went to the office door and called—

"Johnny!"

The man who had ushered Tim in appeared again in the doorway.

"Johnny, take this kid out and fill him up—if you *can*; Don't let him out of your sight, and bring him back as soon as he's had enough to eat."

His words acted like yeast upon the spirits of little Tim; he winked at Johnny, and favored Felix with a wily little grin.

"I guess we shan't be back in a good while," he said, as they went out. "I'm holler all through."

When they were gone Felix took up his hat and muttered:

"This may amount to something. I'm going to send for Rufe Carnes."

Rufus Carnes was in his room at his hotel, engaged upon a rather unsatisfactory letter to Stanhope, when the office boy tapped at his door.

"They're wantin' you at the telephone," said the boy.

Carnes was prompt at the instrument. "Hello," he said in answer to a second call. "Who's there?"

"Captain B—'s office," came the reply. "Felix. Come over right away, something's up."

"All right," called Carnes, and in another half-minute was on his way.



## CHAPTER XLIII

### A TIMELY MOVE

When Rufus Carnes reached the headquarters of Captain B— and heard the story of little Tim, he was prompt in action.

"We must go at once to that woman's house," he said, "and see what this amounts to. I think I'll take one of your men, Felix; I'll station him outside, in case of need. I'll take the little boy along to point out the place, then I'll send him back. You'd better find him a lodging and keep your eye on him, for a few days at least. We don't want him to go back to this woman just yet."

Little Tim was only too willing to return to the guardianship of one who fed him so bountifully.

When they were within sight of the house, he pointed it out and said:

"That there's where Circus Fan lives, mister—d'ye want me anymore?"

"No, Tim."

The boy started to retrace his steps, then hesitated and came back.

"I say, boss—"

Carnes turned quickly.

"Ye—ye won't tell Fan nothin' about me bein' in this business, will ye? I—I wish yer wouldn't."

"All right, I won't, Tim." And he hastened on, smiling to himself at Tim's caution, as he stood rapping at Circus Fan's door.

She had been at home some moments when Carnes arrived, and had already swallowed the severely simple luncheon with which she had provided herself out of the dollar she had obtained from the pawnbroker.

There was an angry flush upon her cheek, when she opened the door, and a vindictive gleam brightened her eye. She had been gloating in imagination over the fate she had planned for Moss, and which would overtake him a week hence.

She was quite prepared for an official visit, but the good-natured, careless looking individual who greeted her with a smile and hat uplifted, was not just the personage she had in her mind, and while she scrutinized him with some surprise evident in her face, he coolly pushed her front door wide open—Fan's figure, which was a slim one, had filled up the orifice she had thought it prudent to guard—and stepping nimbly past her turned to face her from the center of her own room.

"Be so good as to close the door, madam." On second scrutiny Fan did not find her visitor's face so careless nor so good-natured as she had at first thought it. But she had nothing to fear, so she closed the door, and coolly awaited his first word.

From his position in the center of the room he could see half of the rear room through the open door; and without a word he went toward it and took a survey of the other half. Then he turned again toward Fan.

"Where is Mr. Charlie Jenkins?" he asked peremptorily.

The woman actually laughed.

"You won't find him here," she said. "What do you want with Charlie Jenkins?"

"He was with you a short time ago, nevertheless. I have business with him."

"Are you a policeman?" she asked.

"No, I am not a policeman."

"Well," she said slowly and with evident relish for his coming discomfiture, "I suppose it was something more important than a friendly call that brought you here to see Charlie. And I may as well tell you that you won't be likely to see him by staying here."

"Then I may as well tell *you* that you won't find it to your interest to trifle with me, especially if you are this fellow's friend. If you know where he is, you would better tell me."

She sat down upon the nearest chair and looked up at him with a sneer.

"I don't think it will be kept a state secret," she said, "so I may as well be the one to tell you. If you are anxious to see Charlie Jenkins you had better go to Sharp's detective agency. I *think* you'll find him there."

Carnes started and his eyes flashed angrily.

"Do you mean to say," he demanded, "that he has been arrested—*now* within the past hour?"

"That's what I mean to say. He went away with two of Sharp's men in a hack, and I have reason to think from his manner that he did not look upon it as a pleasure trip."

"Tell me what you know about this," he demanded sternly.

"With pleasure. Charlie and I were hungry, and he decided to deposit a small article of more or less value, with a gentleman who lives near Black Alley. Moss, they call him."

Carnes nodded.

"It was I, in fact, who recommended Moss—and don't I wish I hadn't—I went with Charlie and waited a long time, a *very* long time for a hungry woman to wait, at the nearest corner. Well, it seems that the article he presented to Moss played the mischief. While I waited,



Moss sent for Sharp's men and put poor Charlie into their clutches."

"Do you know what was the charge upon which they took him?" asked Carnes.

"That I don't. I wish I did!"

"What was the article he undertook to pawn?"

"A Cameo ear-ring."

Carnes made an impatient gesture, and turned toward the door.

"Tell me one thing," he said, "are you a friend to this fellow, this Jenkins? Are you disposed to help him if you can?"

"Are you?" she retorted.

"I am not his enemy—I wish him no harm. Answer me."

"If I am a friend to anyone," she said, her face clouding, "I'm a friend to Charlie Jenkins. I don't want to get into trouble on his account. I've had trouble enough in my time—but I'd help him if I could. Yes, indeed!"

"I'll see you again in the course of the day," said Carnes abruptly. "I'm not in concert with Sharp, and you had better look upon me as a well-disposed person, and not try to avoid me. In case you *should* feel like changing your quarters, I'll just mention that my men are watching this house; if you happen to go abroad one of them will accompany you. Stop—have you any reason to think that Sharp or his men may give you a call? will this Charlie be likely to send for you?"

"He may. Perhaps he will."

Without another word her visitor strode to the door, opened it and looked out upon the street where a blue-coated man stood idly gazing about him; he made a sign and the blue-coat promptly approached the door.

"Get me a hack, Johnny."

The blue-coat moved away briskly and Carnes turned to the woman.

"Now, madam, to keep you out of the clutches of Sharp & Co, I am going to take you under my protection, as it were. Consider yourself my guest. You shall be well lodged and comfortable, but I shall require your parole. Until Sharp & Co. show their hand, I want you where I can find you."

"In other words you put me under arrest. You said you were not an officer!"

"You are not under arrest. I said I was not a policeman. Come, I fear your friend Jenkins has got himself into serious trouble, and you and I may turn out to be his only friends; I don't want to put you under arrest but—"

"Oh, I'll go," the woman said resentfully. "Needs must, I suppose, but I should very much like to know who you *are*, and what this is all about!"

"If things take the turn that I anticipate, we will probably understand each other in a day or two," said her cool captor.

With a muttered rejoinder not intended for his ears, Circus Fan turned away to make her scant preparations, and in a few moments she was driving away with Carnes, congratulating herself that at least he had promised her a comfortable lodging, and wondering what strange fate had overtaken Charlie Jenkins.

Before they drove away, however, Carnes had leaned out of the carriage, and said in an undertone to the blue-coated man, who had returned upon the box with the driver, and who had descended to perform the office of footman for the two:

"Stay here and watch this house until I send you a relief. If any of Sharp's men come here I want to know it."

Late that afternoon, just as the "relief," was beginning to find his watch monotonous, two men approached the abode of Circus Fan and knocked vainly and long, for admittance. They walked around the house, examined the rear exit, and seemed unwilling to believe the evidence of their senses.

While they stood before the door irresolute, a blue-coated policeman sauntered by, none other than our now very alert "relief."

"I say, officer," called one of the men. "Do you know who lives in this house?"

The policeman approached them with cheerful alacrity.

"It's a woman called Circus Fan," he said. "I don't know any other name for her."

"Do you know anything of her whereabouts?"

The blue-coat turned toward them a face of amiable candor.

"I should say she may have left the city," he said. "She went away about noon with a grip-sack and a bundle."

"Alone?" asked one of the men.

"Alone," said the blue-coat, and walked away, a broad grin overspreading his face, when he saw them, over his shoulder, hastening in an opposite direction.

And thus it was that Carnes began by prompt action, the duel of wits that was to wage between Sharp & Co., and himself for many a day.



## CHAPTER XLIV

### THE FLY AND THE WEB

Sharp & Co were expeditious in preparing for the town a new and welcome sensation.

The newspapers, and that large class of gentry who live by their wits upon other people's earnings, and while so living find ample time to regulate the affairs of their neighbors, and the nation, rejoiced in it.

The "*Morning Owl*" told the story with a flourish of trumpets and these startling headlines:

"MURDER WILL OUT!"

"AN ASSASSIN RUN TO EARTH!"

"THE GOOD WORK OF SHARP'S AGENCY!"

"THE MURDER OF MRS. WARHAM!"

"A MYSTERIOUS UNKNOWN!"

"LIGHT AT LAST ON THE WARHAM MYSTERY!"

"More than four months ago our city was startled by a murder as strange and mysterious as any that has ever been recorded in our annals of crime—the murder of Mrs. Warham, the lady, who while visiting our city, and a guest of the *Avenue House*, met her death mysteriously in the alley which separates the liquor house of Feist & Weld, from Ballard's Block. Death had, too evidently, been caused by blows upon the head, dealt with some blunt instrument, and the body had been

## ROBBED.

"It will probably be remembered by those who were interested in the case, that the woman's pocket was found turned inside out; but that while one ear had lost its pendant jewel, the other, on the side on which the body lay when found, remained, and passed into the hands of the police—rather, into the hands of

## SHARP AND CO.,

who ever since have worked unceasingly to unravel this mystery which has been a shame to our city.

"It was to this cameo ear-ring that the assassin finally owes his undoing; its fellow has been photographed and copies placed in the hands of pawnbrokers all over the city, and in many other cities as well. Yesterday morning the murderer presented himself to one Moss, who keeps a little pawn-shop near that none-too-reputable place, Black Alley. The pawnbroker with commendable sagacity contrived to detain the villain while he sent for Sharp's men who took him at once into custody.

## "THE MURDERER

—for there seems little doubt that he *is* the murderer—was more than half-intoxicated when taken; he showed great terror when arrested, resisted with drunken frenzy, and finally, when examined in Sharp's private office, told a maudlin story in which he exhibits much tipsy ingenuity.

"When asked his name, he blurted out something which the officers could not understand except that it began with a syllable like Charl—or Carl; the surname was quite unintelligible, and when they asked him to repeat it, he stubbornly refused to do so and gave them instead the name Charlie Jinkins, which too evidently is a *nom de plume*.

"In fact he does not attempt to deny this, but resolutely refuses to tell anything about himself, clinging, since he became sober, to his story of yesterday, which we give for what it is worth.

"According to 'Mr. Charlie Jenkins,' he belongs to the numerous tramp family, and he tramped into Chicago some thing more than seven months ago, as nearly as he can remember, from parts unknown or unnamed; upon his manner and means of living since that time Mr. Jenkins is very reticent, but as we do not find his name upon the lists of the Palmer, the Grand Pacific, or in fact any of our great and much patronized hotels, we presume that he has lived in some more retired and modest manner. His story about the ear-ring is simply this: On Saturday he was drunk—drunk all day, and his very convenient memory refuses to serve him when he seems trying to recall the place which furnished him with a night's lodging, except that it was somewhere near the place where the body was found. On Sunday morning, he was wandering down C— street not more than half-awake when his attention was attracted by something in the alley between Feist & Weld's and Ballard's; this object proved to be the body of a woman with—strange oversight in some one—a watch and chain and other jewelry beside the fatal cameo ear-ring upon her person. He took this jewelry, he frankly admits, but he could not muster the courage to lift the head and secure the other ear-ring. This is

#### CHARLIE JENKINS' STORY,

but Sharp & Co. are busy making important additions to it, which will appear duly, and, no doubt, materially change the complexion of this vague and improbable version.

This probable murderer is a man of twenty-four, or



thereabouts, who may at one time have been a fairly good-looking fellow of the thin blonde type. His face now is marked by dissipation, his eyes are dull, and his manner nervous and excitable.

"He told this story yesterday with drunken volubility, but to-day is taciturn and silent; he professes to be hopeless; says that he is innocent, but is friendless and can make no defense. At times he gives way to bursts of tearful despair, but no argument, threats nor persuasion, will extract from him any information as to who he is, whence he came, or what was his motive for committing the deed.

"He admits having pawned the other articles taken from the murdered woman, and Sharp's men will no doubt recover them. There is a theory that the stranger who is known to have visited Mrs. Warham at her hotel, may have been the instigator of the deed, and this man 'Jinkins' his hired tool; Sharp & Co. are better than their name, and the result is in their hands. We await developments, and firmly believe they will find the key to the mystery surrounding this most shameful murder."

Following this was a reporter's interview with Moss, the pawnbroker, in which it appeared that it was to this worthy that Sharp's men owed their knowledge of Circus Fan, and following that, interviews with everyone who could or would say a word about the affair, all highly colored, sensational to the last degree, and carrying the reader away from the realm of fact, and far into that of conjecture and improbability.

It was this version given by the "*Owl*," that Rufus Carnes first presented to the notice of Circus Fan, on the morning after he had installed her in a snug room, under the home-like roof, and the watchful eye of a woman who, from long experience, knew how to look

after her charge. Mrs. McCord for many years had won praise as a successful and humane prison matron, and she opened her doors to Circus Fan at Carnes' request, with perfect readiness and, best of all, perfect intelligence.

While Fan perused the columns of the "*Owl*," not stopping until she had mastered the very last interview, and accompanied the writer upon his last conjectural flight, Carnes sat opposite her, waiting in grave patience until she should finish. His manner was serious, alert and business-like, his face thoughtful.

Already he had taken upon himself the championship of the poor wretch now writhing in the clutches of Sharp & Co., as if he were personally accountable for any wrong suffered at their hands, or at the hands of justice, then or in the future, by this unfortunate unknown.

"Well!" said Carnes, when Fan at last lowered the paper and looked across at him with anxious, astonished eyes. "This helps us toward an understanding, don't it?"

"Mercy!" ejaculated the woman, "it's horrible! Charlie never killed that woman; I'd swear to it."

"Could you swear to an *alibi*? One that Sharp and all his agency could not break? That's the only swearing that will be likely to help your Mr. Jenkins now."

Fan looked serious and remained silent.

"Now," said the detective, rising and standing straight before her, "you see the sort of trouble that is menacing your friend—tell me, are you disposed still to befriend this man, if you can do so with safety to yourself?"

Her answer, in its readiness surprised him a little.

"Now that I know what the trouble is, I have no fear for myself; I have no cause for fear. Drunken sot as that fellow is, do you notice that in telling his story he never speaks of me. He's a gentleman at heart *yet*, and, even in his cups, he's always treated me with more

respect than—than I ever meet with elsewhere. I'm going to befriend Charlie Jenkins if I can find out how. And let me tell you that if you are trying to find out something, if you are playing a part, and are not a friend to Charlie, you won't get any help from *me*. I'm not a *fool*, whatever you take me for!"

"If I had taken you for a fool I would not be talking with you now, and, to prove that I have more confidence in your profession of friendship for this man than you have in mine, I will tell you my position in a nutshell."

Carnes did not add that he had catechized little Tim narrowly, and taken other means to assure himself of her sincerity. Nor that under pretense of being an emissary of Sharp's, and of making a search for Fan, he had visited Moss in Black Alley, and from him heard of her wrathful descent upon the pawnshop.

"I have been interested in this murdered woman's case from the first," resumed Carnes, "and had traced the murder home, or so I thought. Of course I do not attempt to conceal from you the fact that I am a detective."

"I have heard more or less about the most prominent of the city detectives," said Fan, in a tone that was skeptically suggestive.

"I don't count myself among the most prominent," said Carnes, smiling at her cunning. "But you *may* possibly have heard of Rufus Carnes."

"Are *you* Rufus Carnes?" She started forward and looked at him with renewed interest.

"That is my name. Shall I ask Mrs. McCord in to vouch for me?"

She shook her head, and her manner was quite subdued as she replied, "No, now that I look at you—and *know*, I do not doubt. If you are Carnes the detective, I am not afraid to promise you my aid, anything that I



can do; you were hurt last summer; I saw it in the newspapers."

"Yes," he said; "it was that that causes us this trouble now; but for that accident I might have caught the assassin in the very act; I had him under my eye. I don't know this man that you call Charlie Jenkins, but I believe him innocent of Mrs. Warham's death, and it is my duty to save him if I can—there are reasons, as you must see, why I do not wish to appear openly in opposition to Sharp & Co. I shall depend upon you to keep my secret and to act for me. If you will remain here with Mrs. McCord, she will make you comfortable, and for any trouble that I may give you, you shall be well repaid."

Poor Circus Fan! two tears stood in her eyes; and there was a little break in her voice when she said:

"It was to get me food that poor Charlie ran himself into that trap, Mr. Carnes. I—I'm too poor to refuse your help—but—I won't be paid for trying to help Charlie."

She meant it honestly—and she worked with a will; nevertheless, long after, when the tangled skein was finally unraveled, Circus Fan received her reward.

## CHAPTER XLV

### RESIGNED TO HIS FATE

While Sharp and his men were actively endeavoring to prove him guilty, and Carnes and Circus Fan were just as actively trying to convince themselves first, and afterward the world, of his innocence, "Charlie Jenkins," in his cell, was developing some traits hitherto unsuspected in him—an obstinacy that was proof against reasoning, threats, entreaties, all the arguments that could be brought to bear, by Sharp and his allies on the one side, and by Carnes, through the medium of Circus Fan, on the other.

In short, after his first outbreaks of terror and anger, when he had become thoroughly sobered, knew the charge against him, and had found time to face the full horror and hopelessness of it, when he had again and again declared his innocence, and found his declarations of no avail, he relapsed into a hopeless, silent calm, the calm of the fatalist. In this mood he was exasperating to the men who had thought to wring from him, once they had him under their hands, a ready confession of guilt.

They had captured a maudlin drunken fellow, cowardly, talkative, as weak as he was wicked, and they anticipated no difficulties.

He had talked enough on the day of his capture; he had talked too much; that he was silent and sullen on the following day did not disturb them.

"Let him alone," said the chief inquisitor. "Let him entirely alone for a few days. Don't let him see *anyone*. Give him time to think it out in *solitude*. That will settle him."

It did. But not as they had anticipated.

He had said his say. So he reasoned within himself, and they had not believed him—how should they?—he a poor, besotted, nameless, friendless waif. A woman had been murdered and robbed, her watch, her purse, her jewels had found their way into his possession. He had acknowledged the theft, and they would not believe him. They demanded his true name, his past history; what had these to do with this murder? They would like his story if he had a story, to exploit it in the newspaper; why should he tell it? Why should he declare anything? His word, unsupported, was less than nothing; and there was no one to support it, not one. Even Fan had abandoned him. Could it be possible that she did not know what had befallen him?

He did not know that the newspapers had already made him famous, the most recent wonder—for nine days. He did not know that Fan had twice applied for admission to him, and had been refused. He did not know that he was undergoing the test of solitary confinement.

On the morning of the fourth day of his solitude, he awoke cold and shivering, weak too, with clammy hands, and cold sweat-drops standing out upon his forehead.

It was in this condition that his inquisitors found him, but his weakness did not make their task easier.

He had not asked himself why they had staid away; he looked upon his fate as virtually settled. He was accused of murder; he had no defense; there was circumstantial evidence enough to hang him, and neither money nor influence to overbalance the evidence. There would



be a trial, a pretense of one, and Sharp & Co. would have things all their own way. When it was over—well, he had heard of innocent men who were hanged, and it had happened that, after the deed was done, the truth came to light; the real murderer confessed upon his death-bed, or was found out—too late.

If this should happen in his case, how useless it would be. *He* should leave behind him no friends to be glad that his name had been vindicated while they wept that his life had been sacrificed. He should die, when the time came, as for the past six months he had lived, "Charlie Jenkins," a waif.

Not that he wanted to die, oh no—he was not insane—but Fate had willed it. It was useless to quarrel with Fate.

Far more difficult to manage than the man who will not give up, is the man who *has* given up.

"Charlie Jenkins," presented to his visitors, when at last they came, a sufficiently pitiable aspect; pallid, shivering, weak; his eyes hollow and heavy and down-cast.

But he had no answers for their questions; he was indifferent to their threats, promises, protestations.

"I have no more to say," he said, and said no more, until they drew him a graphic picture of his probable fate.

"Well," he said then, with just a gleam of impatience in his tired eyes. "You can't hang me *to day*."

When they went away baffled, he felt no sense of triumph, although had he been in a state of mind to appreciate the fact, he had thwarted two of Sharp & Co's wiliest men. He had no thought of this. He had simply taken the easiest way, when effort seemed useless.

When his visitors left him, one of them said to the warden:

"Let him see anyone that comes—but be sure to report all such to Sharp." And to make assurance doubly sure, they set a man to dog the steps of any visitor who might take an interest in their prisoner.

Circus Fan was the first to come, and she came armed at all points, assured by Carnes that her admittance was only a question of time; she was prepared to continue her siege indefinitely, and she was prepared, too, for questions; for any emergency; thoroughly drilled by Carnes, she knew what to say and what to leave unsaid; what to know, and what not to know.

Charlie Jenkins was glad to see her; the tears sprang to his eyes, which were beginning to brighten with fever. But he was not inclined to talk, and Fan had been instructed not to tell him that others were at work in his behalf.

"I know all about it, Charlie, she said soothingly, "and it's a shameful thing to accuse you of. Of course I know you didn't do it."

"I didn't, Fan."

"I wish you had told me about those things, Charlie—that purse and the rest. I might have helped you more. You've got to have help, boy, and poor old Fan after all don't know how to begin. I've never asked you questions, Charlie, not even asked your name. But now that you're in trouble you must tell me about yourself. If you've got friends anywhere they must come out and help you."

"There's nothing to tell, Fan, and I haven't a friend in the world but you. If I had—or had a name—other than the one you gave me—do you think I would drag it before the world *now*—and friends—do you think they would bless me for dragging them into disgrace along with myself? I'm nothing, I tell you, Fan! you're my only friend; and *you* had better keep away from me, for your own sake."

Something, perhaps it was the danger of her *protégé*, perhaps the effect of Carnes humane discourse, seemed to have softened a spot in Fan's hardened heart, and made her for the moment conscientious of speech.

"I've got nothing to lose, Charlie—perhaps if I *had* I'd be only a fair-weather friend myself. But, boy, you *must* make a defense."

"I've told my story," he said doggedly, "and they laughed at me. Don't worry about me, old girl. It—it's of no use."

When Circus Fan went out, after her fruitless effort to arouse him to action, she said to the warden:

"That boy is coming down with chills and fever, or something worse; he was half-starved when they brought him here, and I don't spose *you've* fed him on the fat of the land. If he gets too sick I spose I can come here and see that he don't suffer for anything, can't I?"

"We'll see about that," said the warden, who had generally a smile, sometimes a soft word for a pretty face, but who did not waste either upon faded bohemians like Circus Fan.

The next day the prisoner was not so well and he grew worse daily. His illness caused a stay of proceedings. Even if he were inclined, he was too ill to talk or to listen, when the time for his examination and his trial came.

It was a long, low fever; "typhoid malarial" the prison doctor called it, and Fan was rather pleased than otherwise with the long-winded, meaningless name that gave dignity to his prostrate condition, and staved off, for the time, the "proceedings" of the courts.

"It's irregular meals, and none at all, exposure, anxiety, and the taking away of his whisky all at once that *ails* him," Fan said confidentially to Carnes. "He's got down mighty low, and he's going to come up slowly,



but it's all the better for *us*, and McCord won't let him hurry himself more than is good for him, I guess."

For Mrs. McCord, Circus Fan's hostess, being a woman of established reputation at the jail, had been installed as nurse; which installation had been brought about in a modest and unobtrusive manner, by Carnes and his friends.

## CHAPTER XLVI

### ON THE TRAIL

During the long weeks that Charlie Jenkins lay in prison, not sick enough to die, yet too sick to get up and be hanged, Carnes found his occupation tedious.

Only once had he visited the prisoner, and that visit was merely one of observation. He made no attempt to converse with the sick man, but went, disguised of course, and in the character of a mild and curious philanthropist, at the heels of Circus Fan, who kept him well in the background, while she drew the patient out, speaking of him as "a good gentleman who came in to see if he needed anything."

As often as once a week, Carnes paid a visit to Joseph Larsen; but his malady did not seem to abate, and so, with one eye upon the jail, and one upon the asylum, Carnes found the days dragging by on leaden feet, and began to take morbid views of life.

Meantime, with Stanhope in New York, it was quite otherwise.

Upon reaching that city, Stanhope had sought out his friend Jones, and was soon put in possession of the single fact which had seemed to the New York reporter, a sufficient reason for summoning him thither. Jones was a man of brisk action, and few words, and he had known Stanhope from boyhood.

"I knew you'd come as quick as steam could bring you, Dick," he said, "unless you had hit on a hotter trail; it won't take me long to tell what I've got for

you—you see I've been doing the theaters and at W—'s I struck a trail. W—, you must know, is a clever soul, which don't by any means unfit him for his business, and he usually sees any and all applicants, who are in the least promising in person. Well, sir, when I showed him that picture you sent me, he seemed to know it *at once*. He declared that the original had called upon him only *the day before*, asking for a trial engagement. He had told her that there would be no chance for her for a week or ten days, but when they put on the new extravaganza they would require a good many ladies, and, if she chose to try the ballet, she might find her chance then."

"And the week," broke in Stanhope, "is the week up?"

"It is up to-morrow; I telegraphed you promptly—"

"And I did not receive it until it was twenty-four hours old."

"Well," said Jones, "you are here in time. You must see W—, eh?"

"Yes. and the sooner the better. Did she leave no address?"

"Not she. They seldom do, W— says. Now, Dick, how much are you going to tell me about it?"

"Everything," answered Stanhope. "Everything—almost." And so he did.

On the evening of the same day they saw W—, the manager of one of the great popular theaters. He was a busy man, but he knew Jones for a busy man also, and Stanhope was not unknown to him by name.

It was easy to put the case before such a man as manager W—; and when he had heard it, he was ready to give his help. "I *think* we have the girl you are looking for," he said with decision. "I will aid you if I can. Perhaps," turning to Stanhope, "*you* would like a place in the extravaganza."



"I might," declared the detective. "But first let us see if the lady comes; and if *she* joins your company."

It was arranged that Stanhope should loiter about the theater, when the new piece began its rehearsals.

"I don't think you will have to wait long," said Manager W—. "I think the young lady meant business; she was as prompt-spoken as possible, and straight to the point. And she had a voice that struck me at once as full of possibilities, low and sweet but neither light nor weak, and a better soubrette stage presence one does not often meet with. The girl *interested* me."

"Well," said Jones, turning toward the detective, "when W— says *that* of anyone it means something."

Stanhope was thoughtful for a moment. Then—

"I wish you could recall your conversation," he said.

"It was not long," the manager said; "she did not try to make talk. She came straight to business. She wanted to try her fortune upon the stage, and she wanted practical advice about the best way of making a beginning. When I told her, what I tell all young aspirants, that experience was better for one than any amount of lessons in 'elocution' and close study, she looked as if she did not half like it."

The detective smiled. He was thinking of that letter to Rose Hildreth.

"But she soon saw the reason in my argument, and asked me if I could give her a chance in the ballet, and would work her hard enough to find out if she had any talent. 'If I have ability,' she said, 'enough of it, that is, to take me out of the ranks of the underpaid and commonplace, I can work hard and I *will*. But I will *stop* the very day I am told, by a competent judge, that I am no better than five hundred others in the same role. She said it with a vim," the manager added, and laughed at the remembrance.

"And was that the end?" asked Stanhope.

"There was little more said. She wanted to begin at once, and I told her of the chance in the new play. She seemed so loath to wait even for a week that, although she was very well dressed, I wondered why she did not ask me what I would pay for her services. But when I mentioned the matter of weekly payment she waved it away with a fine gesture. 'I'm not anxious about money—at present,' she said. 'For the present I am only anxious to find out if I really have any talent.'"

Stanhope got upon his feet.

"It sounds," he said with a quick look toward Jones, "it sounds vastly like—like the girl I'm looking for—and you think then that she is likely to come soon?"

"I believe that she will be here within two days. It will not surprise me to see her to-morrow. If you have observed the dramatic column of the papers, you will have seen that the great spectacle of '*Juinivere*' begins its rehearsals to-morrow."

"Then," said Stanhope, "I must be here too;" and they quickly laid the plans for his appearance at the theater in the morning.

\* \* \* \* \*

Stanhope had made his journey to New York, upon receiving the telegram from his friend, without loss of time and with much loss of sleep; and that night, after parting with manager W——, he went at once to the reporter's quarters, and in accordance with his self-imposed rule, to recover lost sleep when he could and where he could—he retired early and slept late; not too late, however, to have breakfasted and made sundry changes in his personal appearance, before applying at the stage-door for admittance, not ten minutes after it had opened for the first time that morning.

It had been arranged that he should see the manager

at once upon his arrival, in order to be presented by him to certain other majestic personages in and about the place; and he asked of the boy who admitted him:

"Is Mr. W—— in his office?"

"Yes sir," said the boy, and then to Stanhope's surprise he added, "he says you are to come up as quick as possible."

"By Jove, sir!" began the manager the moment the detective was shut in with him and the key had been turned in the lock, "I'm *glad* you've come! good morning. *Good* morning! I hope you slept well. I hope you feel refreshed, for, 'pon my honor, I believe you've got pretty *nearly* your match; what would you give for news from your missing one this morning?" Here the manager was obliged to draw a breath, and his visitor found time to exclaim:

"What! Have you heard from her?"

"*Heard!* I have *seen* her, man!"

"*Seen her!* what! *this morning!*"

"*No*, sir! *Last night*, not ten minutes after you left. There!" throwing himself into his easy-chair and taking a longer breath. "What do you think of *that* for enterprise?"

"I shall know better what to think," retorted Stanhope, "when you explain. I begin to fear that this interesting young person has bought out my interest, and that you are gone over to the enemy."

"I tell you, sir," said the other with more sobriety, "I was sorely tempted. But no, I'm a scarred veteran, and I didn't quite lose my head. Well, I'll tell you how it was."

Stanhope leaned toward him across the table; his interest was manifest in his face.

Rufus Carnes would have listened with a look of indifference, but Stanhope was an enthusiast, although he could be cool enough at will.



"You had not been gone ten minutes," began the manager, "when the lady appeared in my office, just as I was about to leave it; she began as promptly as before: 'I saw by the papers that your new play begins its rehearsal to-morrow;' she began, 'and I thought it might be best to come this evening. Have you kept a place for me?' I told her that I had, and she seemed well pleased, and after asking particularly about the *time*, she seemed in a hurry to go. I stopped her and said, 'You have not given me your address, Miss'—I hesitated for she had not given me her name. 'My name is Miss Burton,' she said, 'and my address—pardon me, but I would rather not give it.'"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Stanhope.

"You may say so. Well sir, I told her that it was our rule to keep upon our books the place of residence of every member of the ballet—that it was just a matter of business; but she suddenly turned upon me such a battery of pretty looks and artful coaxing, that she gained her point, and in fact I could not help myself, for she declared that if I refused to let her come and go without questions she must stay away altogether, much as she wanted to come. Of course I gave in *then*; and so she went, promising to be here this afternoon promptly at two o'clock."

"And of course you sent some one to follow her home?" cried Stanhope, half-rising.

"My *dear* sir! Did not I tell you that the girl was *clever*? She made me *promise* that I would never at any time send anyone to follow her or to spy upon her in *any way*. She made no excuses, no explanations; but—she got my promise."

Stanhope sank back in his chair. "And you let her go like *that*, then?"

"Not I. I had promised not to *send* anyone, and so I

did not. I clapped on my hat and followed her—"

"Ah!"

"She went out swiftly, walked to the cab-stand over there and took a carriage."

"And *you*?"

"I—I took a cab."

"Go on."

"There's not much more. She drove a dozen blocks and then the carriage stopped on Fifth Ave., she got out, and so did I. She crossed the street, walked a block, and hailed *the very cab* I had gotten out of."

"Good! and then?"

Manager W— got up and walked across the small office and back again, until he faced the detective, still standing. "Through all this I had been thinking of *you* and *your* interests," he said. "Now I suddenly thought of *myself* and of *her*. I had promised to aid you, but *I* was not a detective. A detective, engaged in his work, with the honest motive of righting wrongs, and capturing criminals, is honorably employed, but I was *not* a detective, consequently I was *a spy*; nothing better. I did not know what that little girl had done, but whatever it was, she was safe from further spying at *my* hands; I turned about and came back to my business."

"Well!" said the detective with a half-sigh; "I can't blame you—what you did was *right*—for you—"

"What I did last—or first?"

"What you did last, of course," and the two men laughed. "But there's hope for us yet; she will come to-day; you are sure of that?"

"I have her word."

"Well you have made *me* a promise also."

"Not to interfere—and to give you the run of the place? That I'll stick to; but I'm out of it after that, mind."

"With all my heart," said Stanhope.

Two o'clock came and passed, the first rehearsal of the most picturesque of spectacles began and ended, but the young woman who had joined the ballet without leaving either name or address did not appear.

When this was ascertained beyond a doubt, Stanhope betook himself to the office of the manager and there awaited the closing of the rehearsal. "Look here," he said when Mr. W— appeared, full of wonder and somewhat chagrined, "you must help me this much: tell me the number of the cab you took last night."

The manager stared at him and then uttered a "gentlemanly" oath. "Upon my soul, I never thought of *that*. I could not tell the fellow's number, nor even his *face* if I met it to-morrow. I didn't think of *him*, and I don't much think he belongs to this stand," pointing down the street; "for these fellows all know me, and *he* didn't appear to know me from the coal man. No, sir, I can't help you even there."

"I'll find him!" cried the detective; "I'll find him if he's still in this city!" and he did.

Two days later he wrote a long letter to Carnes, and the mail-bag which contained it carried also, to the same city, and beyond it, two other letters, longer than Stanhope's own, faintly perfumed, and daintily written; and these dainty missives, could Stanhope have secured them, and perused them, with the understanding, would have speedily caused him to forget his search for the unknown cab-driver.



## CHAPTER XLVII

### THE LETTERS

Stanhope's letter began with a terse account of his meeting with manager W—, and the way in which the girl, believed by both to be Bertha Warham, had eluded him.

"The manager," wrote Stanhope, "seemed half-inclined to think that she had discovered my presence at the theater, but, after reflection, that looks to me improbable; I am now inclined to think that there is some other person, a man of course, at the bottom of the mischief; that she is either trying to avoid or evade some one, or else that the theater was only a project—something to be taken up in case something else of more importance, or greater interest to the lady, failed her. I believe Miss B. W. would be quite equal to 'throwing an anchor to windward' in that way.

"Well, it is not easy work to find a numberless cabman, but I found the man who carried the young lady home after dropping Manager W—, and he took me to the place where he had left her; it was a genteel boarding house. I won't bother you with details, old man; you know how we go about these things. I lost no time and got my reward.

"By Jove, Carnes, that girl is a witch. Here are the minutes: The young lady was deposited at the door by cabby at, or very near, eight o'clock, and just ten minutes later a man rang the bell, and asked to see Miss Burton, that is the name our young lady—if she is ours!

—gave the landlady; she came down and received a letter from the stranger, who at once departed. In ten minutes more one of the boarders met ‘Miss Burton,’ bonneted for the street again and going down the stairs. Another boarder—a woman of course—saw through her window that a carriage was drawn up just midway between that house and the next, saw Miss B—enter it, and—that’s all. Once more she has vanished

“Now, old man, I am getting aroused—and interested. I won’t say that I’ll bring the girl home; but I’m going to know the secret of her flitting and see her face to face, if we both remain upon this planet a little longer. I am getting some odd notions about this missing Bertha Warham, *and—I mean to find her,* and never to touch another case until I do.”

“Poor Dick!” said Carnes, when he had finished reading this letter; “I’m afraid he’s caught a tartar.”

“I shall stay here some days longer,” finished Stanhope. “I mean to search this big city thoroughly and Jones will be my aid.

“I have little faith in finding the lady here; I have a fancy that she’s flitting from point to point, and if this is so, with that face of hers, I shall yet catch up with her; keep me well-informed, Rufus. If you don’t recall me to Chicago I shall be likely to go from this place to *Boston*. Yours, off the scent, STANHOPE.”

The next letter bearing the New York postmark is from Miss Adeline Rooseveltdt to Mrs. Jacob Baring, and runs as follows:

“MY DEAR AUNT:—According to my promise, I will try to give you the benefit of my impressions as regards Ellen Jermyn’s new home and married life. First then, if one can only get over wondering how *any* one can pre-

fer to live in New York rather than Boston or Philadelphia, there is little fault to find with Ellen's home. Her house is perfect of its kind, and the location irreproachable. Ellen too seems very well content, although it is plain *to me* that her health is failing. Mr. Jermyn is his usual self—always the same grave, courteous gentleman, that we first knew in Roseville. He is *very* studious and fond of making chemical experiments. He seems to care very little for society, yet is a delightful host. Sometimes I fancy that Ellen is not *quite* so happy as she should be with such a husband, and such a home. I think that they are not always in perfect harmony, and she feels at times a little isolated. He is so studious, so full of lofty thoughts, so engrossed with his experiments and his scientific essays; he writes much and contributes, under a *nom de plume* of course, to several magazines. I think that even Ellen, who is really so intelligent, finds herself lagging behind a little—and that she *feels it*.

“Her failing health too makes her somewhat moody and fanciful at times, but Mr. Jermyn is all patience and devotion. Of late Ellen has talked sometimes about her half brother Carl Jernyngham, how she has dreams about him, and *really* wants to find him and assist him if he is in need. She told me one day that she had talked the matter over with Mr. Jermyn, and that he quite approved of her idea; she had proposed that they take measures to find him, and wants to make her will and bequeath him a share of her property. I don't quite understand why Ellen has taken up this new idea, but you know she is very conscientious, and thinks that she has been neglectful; she says that she wants to befriend Carl for the sake of the family name. It's charming to see how Mr. Jermyn approves and enters into all the plans. He has promised her that he would consult lawyers and take steps toward finding Carl at once.



"They talk of making a journey soon, of traveling west, and south, for some months. Mr. Jermyn is *sure* it will benefit her health. Ellen didn't seem to care much about the proposed trip at first, but the doctor assured her that she will come back strong and well, and she has decided to go.

"There is nothing new at this time of year in literature, art, or fashion. Grace and I will remain a week longer with Ellen; we have still some shopping to do, and there's no better place than New York for *shopping*, after all—then we shall go back to Philadelphia, and in a few weeks come to you for a little visit.

"Yours with affection, ADELINE ROOSEVELDT."

"P. S. I am surprised to hear that Kenneth Baring still clings to his attachment for that girl Rene Brian. *How it must try you.* A. R."

The last letter, from Grace Roosevelt in New York to Lotta Baring in Roseville, is pitched in a different key.

"MY DEAREST LOTTA:--How I *wish* you were right here to have a nice dish of gossip with me! I could furnish the subject—you would have nothing to do but talk. I am *full* of things to say, and talking on paper is *so* unsatisfactory. I am sitting here all alone in our room, Ad.'s and mine, in Ellen Jermyn's fine new house. It *is* really fine, and splendidly surrounded; it's *ever* so much nicer and jollier than her old Philadelphia wigwam, and New York is *the* city of cities. Oh how I wish *we* lived here! But in spite of appearance, and of Ad.'s declarations to the contrary, I don't believe that Ellen likes it. I don't believe she ever *wanted* to come to New York at all; it's all that man. In spite of his soft slow voice and quiet sedate ways he rules Ellen with a rod of iron; I just *know* it. Ad. is as blind as a mole

to all this; she is that wrapped up in Mr. E. P. Jermyn that she can't see a fault in him.

"If Ad. were prettier and not such an owl, I believe it would make Ellen jealous. It don't take much to make her jealous, let me tell you; I've seen it tried, and as this was on my mind when I began this letter, I'll just tell you all about it here and now, before I wander from the subject again.

"Ad. and I, as you know, have been here now nearly four weeks, and we began at once to quarrel about our host and hostess; Ad. declares and *believes* that Mr. J—is a model of manly perfection, and that if Ellen is not perfectly happy it is because she is unable to appreciate such a paragon, while I declare and *know* that Ellen Jernyngham is a disappointed woman, and that her spouse carries an iron hand under his fur mittens.

"He's too calm and serene and *suave* to believe in. It isn't in nature—nor in grace either—for a man to be so *angelic* and *mean* it. He's *posing*; I said it from the first—he's merely posing, and for whose benefit? or for whose undoing, only time can tell.

"Well, as I said before, or was about to say, nearly two weeks ago Mr. J—mentioned at the breakfast table that he had half-decided to employ an amanuensis. He said that he had been lazy and some writing which he had promised his publishers lay in a state of chaos upon his desk. He thought he would look for some quiet, unobtrusive person, girl or woman, to do the work; he did not like a *man* for such business; besides, he believed in woman's right to earn her living, and if he were an employer he would never give a man the work that women could do, etc. You can't think how this charmed old Adeline. I thought she would devour him with her eyes, and half-expected to hear her offer her services. Ellen said little on the subject, but I was sure that it dis-

pleased her. Once or twice after that he spoke of it, and yesterday morning he told Ellen that he had found a scribe—a young woman had applied to him who seemed very suitable; she was quiet and had good manners. She seemed quite friendless and a stranger to the city; he had not inquired into her private history; she wrote a good hand, and seemed intelligent; that was enough for him; she was a rather *dowdy* little person, he added, and wore blue glasses, to protect her eyes, which looked somewhat red and weak.

Ellen said she was glad that he had found an assistant that suited him, but she was not very enthusiastic, and then he 'capped the climax'. 'If it would not be positively disagreeable to her, would she have a room prepared for this young woman; while she was employed by him he would like to have her under his roof; he should wish sometimes to work evenings and could not send a woman upon the street alone after an evening's work; besides, the girl seemed quite friendless and forlorn, and he wanted to be sure, that, while she was employed by *him* at least, she had a safe home.'

"Ellen demurred to this a bit, but he took high moral ground and appealed to Ad., who seconded him *of course*, and he carried the day. And now at last I come to the point of my story:

"To-day, just after luncheon, we were going out for a drive; Ellen, Ad. and I. His eminence did not join us at luncheon. We had not seen him since breakfast; as a matter of course, I was the first one ready, and ran downstairs to the little reception-room that opens upon the vestibule, and commands a view of the street-door. I had been there about a minute when I heard wheels, and looking out I saw Mr. Jermyn helping a young woman out of a hack; she was dressed all in black, and all tied up in an ugly veil; but she moved with perfect



self-assurance, and with a springy, graceful step. They came up to the door together, and I stepped back from the window, to see them again as they entered. He opened the door with his latch-key, and I heard him say in a tone that was positively caressing and yet perfectly respectful, 'If you will wait a moment in the reception-room, I will call my wife;' and he just touched her lightly on the shoulder and indicated the direction of the reception-room. My! oh my! it was as good as a play. I saw the girl look toward the stairway, and there was Ellen and Adeline; they had heard the latch-key and waited on the lower landing, just out of sight, to see who it might be. Ellen came sailing down the stairs with Ad. in her wake; at the foot she paused a moment and looked straight at him, as white as a shroud. 'Ellen,' he says, ever so softly, 'this is the young woman I told you of—my new amanuensis.'

"*Whew!* I didn't think Ellen Jernyngham *could* be so *rude*. She just let the tail of her carriage gown drop from her fingers, and turning her shoulder squarely upon the girl, swept past her, with the *haughtiest* face—and of course Ad. followed her beastly example. Little idiot! The carriage was at the door and they were in it in a moment and looking around for *me*. I was behind the portiere in the reception-room; I wish you could have seen *his* face; it was livid, and his eyes shot blue lightning. But his voice was serene as usual when he said, 'My dear young lady, pray pardon my wife; she is an invalid with excitable nerves, and is not herself to-day. This is all a mistake. I did not give her sufficient warning. It is my fault.'

"The girl threw up her veil and gave her head a toss, and her voice was as clear and cold, yes, and as *sweet* as iced champagne.

"'It was not your fault, Mr. Jermyn,' she said. 'It is

your *misfortune*, that your wife *is not a lady!*" Think of *that*, Lot. Oh! if Ellen could have heard. 'I did not expect to receive my first insult at the hands of a woman, and *such* a woman. If you will be so good as to call another carriage, I will leave your house at once.' 'You shall not leave my house,' he said, 'until my wife has apologized for her rudeness, and she will readily do it when she understands.' His voice had a strong command in it. 'I insist upon your remaining,' he said. 'I will not remain here alone,' the girl said, 'and I must beg you to consider our arrangement at an end. I cannot assist you.' •

"'You shall please yourself about that,' he said, 'but if you choose to stay, I promise you, hereafter, civil, yes, cordial treatment. There is someone in the house, Miss Burton. I will ask one of my wife's friends to come down to you. She did not go out with the others.'

"Lot, I *liked* that girl. I looked out and saw Ellen and Ad. in the carriage waiting for me and trying to look dignified and unconcerned. I stepped out from the reception-room and said:

"'Mr. Jermyn, if you will say to the ladies that I have decided not to go, I will take this young lady to my room, if she will come, and entertain her until Mrs. Jermyn returns.' Well, so it was, and when Ellen came back her lord and master asked her to speak with him in the library. There were no curses, no tears, no blows, no shrieks; but when Ellen came out she came straight up here, asked the girl to pardon her rudeness, said it was all a mistake, and offered to show her to a room. Then the girl got up and made her a very haughty little bow.

"'Madam,' she said, and her voice was as sweet and clear and correct as Ellen's own, which by the by was a little husky on *this* occasion. 'Madam, I can do no

less than pardon your *mistake*.' (A little sarcasm goes with that emphasis.) 'I am an orphan and utterly friendless, with just enough money in my purse to keep me from starving, perhaps, while I look for other work, that I am fit for and that is fit for me to do. I *hoped* to find employment and protection in your house, and I sadly need both. But I will starve in the street rather than be subjected to another insult such as I received to-night. I can accept neither your patronage nor your hospitality and I will leave your house *now*.' She gave me a little nod, and a half-smile, and marched past Ellen and straight downstairs; when she passed the library door Mr Jermyn came out, hat in hand, and they went away *in Ellen's own barouche*.

"You may guess that Miss Ad. came down upon *me* severely; but Ellen told her to let me alone, and said she was glad I was so considerate—I *know* she fibbed, —and Mr. Jermyn looked upon me with a positive smile as if to say, 'brave female let there be peace between us.'

"Dear me, what an *endless* letter! and I wanted to tell you how Ellen is beginning to be anxious about her half-brother, Carl—and it's high time too, I should think, —he must have been gone now twelve years or more. You know he was *older* than Ellen. Well, I can't account for the Ethiopian in the fence, but he's *there*. Ellen Jernyngham never would have turned her attention to this long absent brother, so suddenly, if she were not dissatisfied with her *husband*. And he need not pretend to be so anxious to find him as *she* is—not for *my* benefit—for I *know* it's shamming. It's *likely* that he wants Carl Jernyngham hunted up to take a big slice of Ellen's fortune away from *him* if she should happen to die!"

"And so Ken Baring is almost a doctor?—worked his



way alone too! Well / think he's a plucky fellow. How surprised you must all have been to see him! And how it must have plagued Mrs. Jake. So he's going to marry Rene after all, when his studies are over, and with his father's consent, too! Well, well! *Poor* Mrs. Jake! How are the mighty fallen!

"Do you believe there's an end to everything? I can't make an *end* of this letter, but I'm going to *stop* it.

"When did you hear from the Sunderlands? How is Linnett? And *how* is Charlie Brian? You never mention him, and that looks suspicious.

Oh dear, here's Ad.; it's time to dress for dinner; amen and amen. Write soon.

"Yours for life.

GRACE ROOSEVELDT."

## CHAPTER XLVIII

### DEATH AND KING CARNIVAL

At the *Mardi-gras* season all leisurely New Orleans, and indeed all laboring New Orleans that is free, happy, and has a dime to spare or spend is given over to Festival and Folly.

King Carnival sways the city. Momus laughs and refuses to distinguish between the fool and the philosopher. How should he, indeed, when the philosopher has donned the cap, and bell, and the fool, for the diversion of himself and his fellows, is testing the comfort of philosophy's gown.

Music and laughter and riot reign. People are crowded in the streets; are jeered at, jostled, dragged hither and thither; what matter, it is carnival time. It is for this they come out, if they are of the city, for this they come down, or up, or over, if they are the city's guests. KING REX is within the gates; everybody is careless; faces must be masked or mirthful. Preservers of the peace smile, wear a flower in the button-hole, try to look unprofessional. Justice and Law and Order fold their garments about them and wearing their wigs awry turn their backs to the noisy street, put their fingers to their ears, close their eyes, and try to persuade themselves and each other that carnival time is a blessed relaxation, that REX is wiser than he seems, that people in New Orleans should "do as the Romans do."

But sometimes the guardians of the peace are forced to drop their rosebuds, and assume professional airs,

and sometimes Justice and her servitors are forced to open their ears, pull their wigs into place, and sally forth—and thus in the motley, tumultuous, brilliant throngs, surging up and down Canal and Common Streets, to meet and salute each other with the meeting of the streets, on the broad Levee, or scattering in gay companies, and hilarious groups, down beautiful Rampart Street—they become grotesque, even ghostly.

On the morning of the great day which followed the triumphal entry of KING REX, Dame Justice was awakened with a shock which thrilled, for a moment, the very heart of Giddy Mardi-gras.

On this morning all was life and bustle in and about a certain great hotel, which, with its exact location, it will be wise not to name, but which for convenience we may call the "Hotel Victor."

The Victor was thronged with guests; rooms had been taken weeks ahead, secured by letter, by telegraph, through agents, through friends; but now the guests had all arrived—so the splendid day-clerk was telling a young man who had just dropped in and was making application for a room.

Just here an assistant spoke over the applicant's shoulder.

"Number 99 was vacant last night," he said.

"99!" the day-clerk frowned, but nevertheless turned to the leaves of his register. "Time of reserve expired yesterday," he said. "99! Wrong Akerts, 99. W. R. Jones and wife, arrived last night, after we went off, I suppose. Have they been to breakfast?"

Upon inquiry it was found that the occupants of 99 had not breakfasted.

The splendid day-clerk knew his business. It was all too common for newly-arrived guests to sleep late or to oversleep; but carnival guests, at the height of the car-



nival season! that was not so common. It was quite usual for them not to go to bed; but not to get up, on a *Mardi-gras* morning, to slumber on long after nine o'clock—upon reflection the day-clerk ordered a knock at the door of 99.

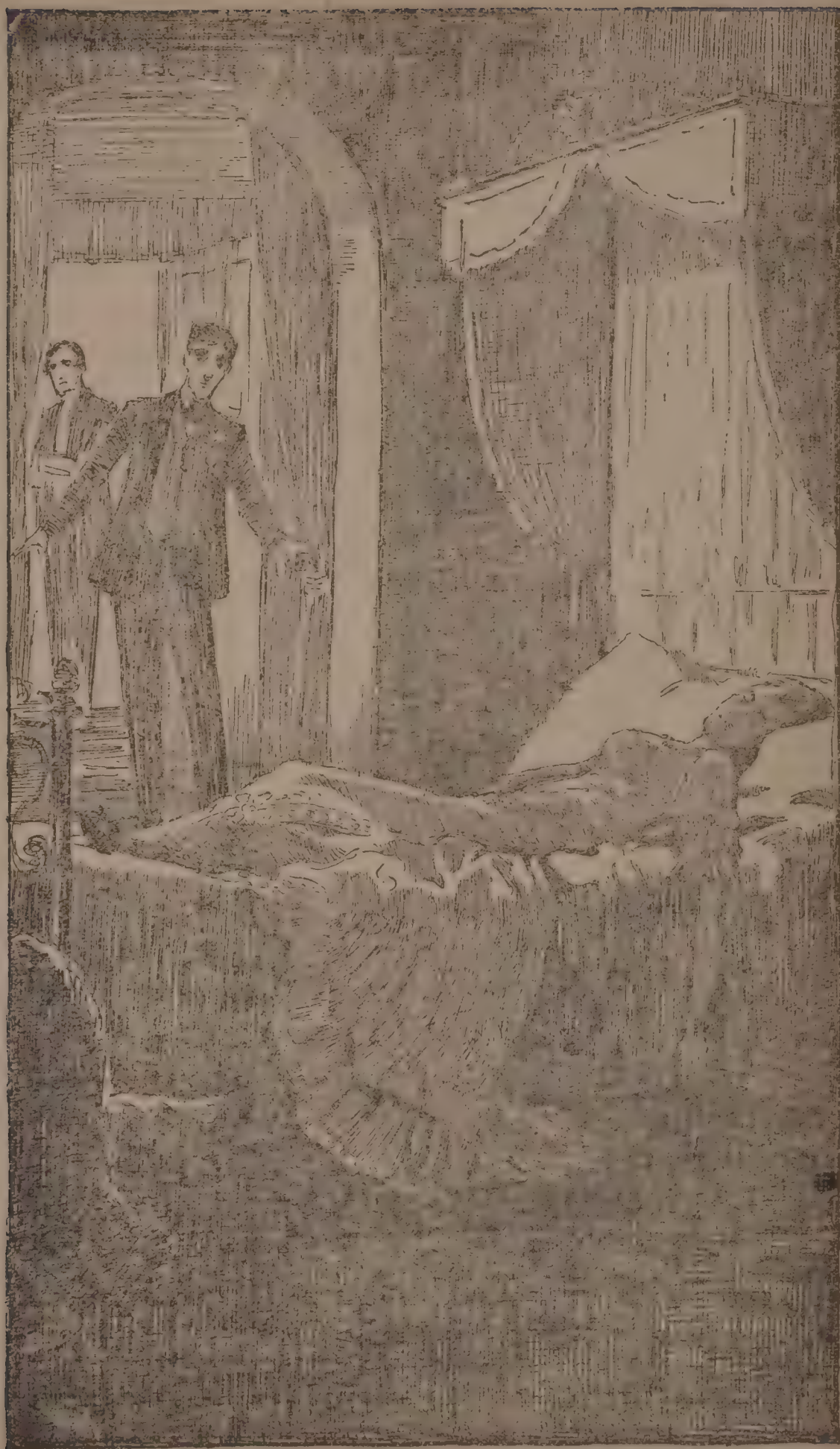
That was the beginning; and, having fixed his attention upon the room, secured long weeks before for "W. R. Jones and wife of New York," the clerk did not relax his vigilance; and when late in the morning "Room 99" remained still closed and silent, he took counsel with the "gentlemanly lessee and manager;" and then calling an assistant, and armed with a bunch of duplicate keys, he went quietly up to room 99 and made, with his knuckles, a personal application for admittance. Receiving no answer to this, he bent and put his eye to the key-hole—the key was not in the lock. Next he turned the door handle, and gave it a vigorous shake, and then with a muttered exclamation of impatience, he fitted the key to the lock, turned it and opened the door.

The room was large, one of the best in the house; well aired and lighted, and sumptuously furnished. In an alcove, at one side, arched and lace draped, stood a brass bedstead, and upon this, only half-concealed by the lace drapery, a woman was lying. One hand hung loosely over the bedside, the face was turned away.

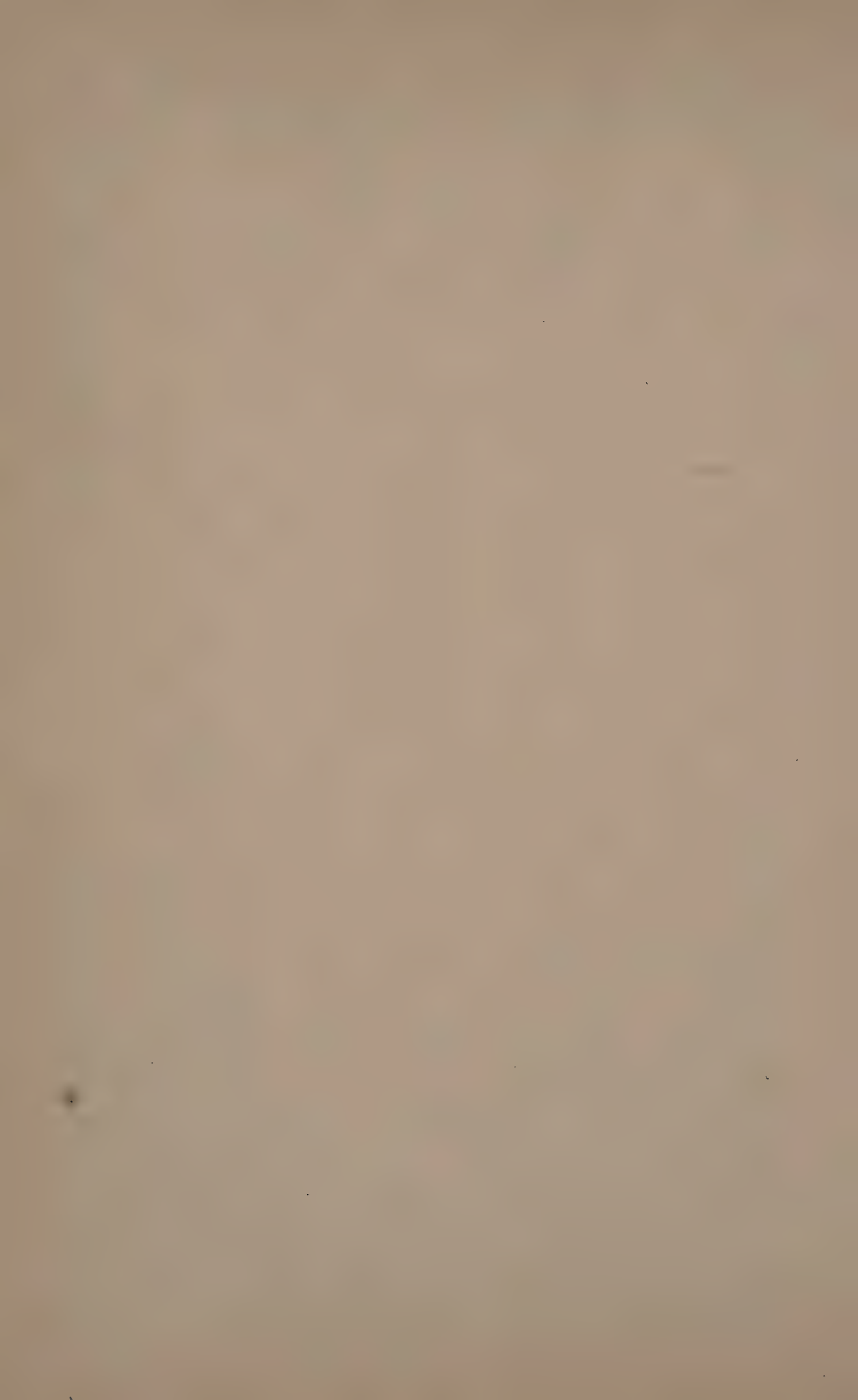
This much the clerk saw as he stood in the doorway, then he softly stepped outside, drew the door shut behind him, and stood with his hand upon the knob.

"Go bring the housekeeper or one of the women, and be quick," he said. "I'm afraid there's something wrong."

Down the long hall a troop of sight-seers came, laughing and chattering gayly. They were sophisticated sight-seers, and when they saw the clerk at his post and wearing a look of anxiety which he had not the time to



ONE HAND HUNG OVER THE BED SIDE, THE FACE WAS TURNED AWAY.  
—Slender Clue, p. 453.





conceal, they knew that it meant something unusual, and they nodded and whispered, and one of them predicted a fresh sensation for the dinner-table.

When the housekeeper came, the clerk pushed open the door and said again in a low tone and with a gesture toward the alcove, "Go in. I'm afraid there's something wrong."

He heard her firm step marching straight across the room toward the alcove; in imagination he saw her touching the white jeweled hand, and bending over to look into the averted face. The housekeeper of the "Victor" was a capable woman with plenty of nerve. Just the woman for the place. Then in a moment he heard a stifled ejaculation, and the footsteps coming back.

He stepped quickly across the threshold and met her horrified gaze.

"She's dead," said the housekeeper.

*"Dead!"*

He beckoned to the assistant who still waited, then they went in and shut the door.

She lay upon the outside of the luxurious lace-draped bed, herself luxurious in her carnival dress, the glowing elaborate court-gown of the eighteenth century. Her features were regular and fine, though emaciated, as if by illness. In life she must have been very pale, she was so frightfully pallid now. The eyes that looked out in that horrible way in which dead eyes peer at us, through half-closed lids, were black, or of the color that passes for black, and must have been beautiful. The dark brows were arched and regular; the lashes long, black and thick; while the abundant hair, elaborately arranged at the top of the head, was of a genuine golden blonde.

The hands were long, slender, white and jewel-bedecked. There were bracelets upon the slim wrists, and a heavy collar of incrustated gold about her neck. The feet were small, arched and daintily shod.

She lay upon her side; the long gleaming robe which on the evening before must have drawn many eyes to her carriage, hung trailing upon the carpet; except for the impressions made by her slender form, the bed was quite undisturbed. The room too was in perfect order. A large trunk stood at the foot of the bed, within the alcove, and a voluminous fur-trimmed cloak was flung across it, as if thrown carelessly there by the wearer.

There was no sign nor hint of a violent death; the features were composed, the hands lay naturally, and lightly open. Calm she lay in the habiliments of King Carnival, and what ghastly trick had he played her, that, with all that glowing brilliant life around her she should lie there so still, so cold, so breathless? Whatever it was, King Carnival had done his work well; and when the three who gazed had assured themselves that nothing could be learned in that silent place, they went out softly, re-locked room 99, and made their appeal from King Carnival to the officers of justice.

## CHAPTER XLIX

### DOCTOR AND DETECTIVE

Richard Stanhope had been in New Orleans four days when the carnival began. Since his letter to Carnes, and his departure from New York, he had visited various cities, with almost unvarying fortune, and many weeks had passed.

Once or twice he had stumbled upon what seemed a clue to the girl he supposed to be Bertha Warham, but these clues had ended in vagueness.

In Philadelphia a second time an officer who was comparatively new to the city, and had not quite clothed himself, as yet, with the dignity of his stately habitation, assured him that he had seen a face surprisingly like that pictured face of Bertha Warham's, once, twice, even oftener, since he came to the city. He had not seen it of late, and was not certain just when or where he *had* seen it. But it was *the same face*; of this he was very sure.

Again, in St. Louis, he came upon a similar clue; but it led to nothing, and when Lew Jones, the New York reporter, set out for the South to be present in his reportorial capacity, at the *Mardi gras* festivities, Stanhope, with whom he kept up an exchange of letters, more frequent than lengthy, was in Denver, having taken a sudden fancy to extend his chase westward.

Jones, intent upon some personal matters not strictly dependent upon the carnival season, left New York more than two weeks in advance of it, and at the last



moment almost, he had received a line from Stanhope.

It was written from Denver, to inform his friend that he was about to set out for Omaha, and from that Western metropolis he would journey direct to New Orleans.

When Stanhope had been seven days in Omaha, and Jones two days in New Orleans, the latter penned a letter to the former, brief but interesting.

"Come at once," it said, "I have found your *ignis fatui*—I am *sure of it*. At any rate I have *seen* her, and it is not probable that she will leave New Orleans *now*, just as everybody else is coming. She passed me in a carriage, attended by a man, of whom I can only say that he was blonde, and I think, good-looking; well-dressed he was at all events. They were driving rapidly, and just as they passed me her light veil blew fairly off; she was laughing, and half-rose to clutch at the flying veil. I saw her squarely for just a moment, but it was the face of your fair fleeing one, *I am sure of it*. From that one glimpse of her I should say she is not taking the world very seriously. When you come I will lend you my valuable aid. Why can't a reporter hunt for a pretty face in a crowd, as well as a detective?"

This letter caused Stanhope to rush to his hotel, make a few of those haphazard dashes and thrusts at his valises which men call packing, and rush away to stow himself on board the train, which, happily for him, was leaving Omaha within the hour, having first sent a message by wire to Jones, to announce his coming.

Once in New Orleans, Stanhope had lost no time in searching the highways and byways, seeking for a glimpse of the baffling face which seemed to be flitting always before him and just beyond his reach; but the day of the carnival came and found Stanhope and his willing aids still searching and still without success.

Very soon after reaching New Orleans, the detective

had looked up young Baring and renewed their brief acquaintance; later he had made the young fellow known to Jones, and finally they had established themselves together; or, rather, Jones and Stanhope had taken rooms in the house in which Baring had been established for some time.

They were snug rooms, in a house built upon the "apartment" plan and inhabited almost exclusively by bachelors and students, who dined where they would, and lived gayly or gravely as it pleased them.

Stanhope was smoking in their small sitting-room, and hungrily wondering why Jones did not make his appearance at their appointed luncheon hour, when the object of his thoughts appeared, bouncing in suddenly and breathlessly and turning to close the door after him with a sharp click; there was a flash of excitement in his light blue eyes, and Stanhope, seeing it, greeted him with the cool query, "What's up, Jones?"

"Something in your line, my boy." Jones, who was a small fellow, and looked quite diminutive beside this muscular young detective, was fond of calling him "boy," while the appellation rather amused Stanhope, who indeed was the younger of the two. There's a queer case over at the 'Victor' and I want you to go down with me. Doctor Garland and Baring are going in, professionally you know; and they'll take us along, if we can't get in on our own merits."

"What's the case?" asked Stanhope continuing to smoke and not particularly interested.

"Well, murder or suicide or sudden death—a young woman found dead in her room in her carnival dress, unknown, unattended, a total mystery."

Stanhope got up and tossed away his cigar.

"Why can't we get in as spectators without the doctor?" he asked.

"Well they're full of tone at the Victor; it's a very swell house. They won't have a mob, a crush, there; policemen guard the entrance even until the inquest—the examination—is over. Dr. Garland makes the au—"

Someone interrupted his speech by tapping at the door. He opened it quickly, and admitted a tall, slender, serious-faced man young yet by years, but by virtue of his gravity seeming old.

"Doctor Garland!" exclaimed Jones; "are you come to take us under your wing and so into the Victor?"

Doctor Garland was young Baring's preceptor, and he had met these two in the rooms of his pupil; as he entered the room, closely followed by Baring he smiled at Jones while he addressed Stanhope:

"I don't wish to seem curious, Mr. Stanhope, but I have gathered from some random words of this young man's," nodding toward Baring, "that you are a detective. Is that true? I do not ask from curiosity alone."

Stanhope bowed.

"I do not care to make my business conspicuous," he said, "but I do not like to deny it unnecessarily. I am not ashamed of it."

"Now, doctor," cried Baring, "that's hardly fair. *How* did I accomplish this slip of the tongue."

"When you refused to name his occupation," smiled the doctor, "you see I thought there could hardly be *two* Stanhopes. But let me explain: you were in San Francisco, were you not, two years ago?"

Stanhope nodded.

"Do you remember the woman who was robbed on the cars while on the way to her brother, who was ill in a fever hospital?"

"Yes."

"Well—that woman was my sister; it was I who, while in attendance at the hospital, was myself stricken down.



I have always hoped to meet you sometime, to be able to thank you."

Stanhope flushed and looked uneasy.

"What did he do?" interrupted the little reporter. "Tell us, Doc."

"Nothing," broke in Stanhope, "nothing at all. Jones, we are detaining Doctor Garland."

"He was on the same train," said the doctor, turning to Jones. "My sister discovered her loss before they reached San Francisco; she was robbed at night in the sleeping-car. Mr. Stanhope did not make himself known; of course there was more or less hue and cry, when she found that she had been robbed; but he astonished people very much, after the excitement had lulled somewhat, by pouncing upon two fellows, when they were together in close conversation, leveling two pistols at their heads and forcing them to disgorge. They were very harmless-looking fellows indeed, and but for him would have gotten off unsuspected. He would accept no reward from my sister, and it was only at her earnest entreaty that he condescended to tell his name. He gave her a half-promise to come to her in the city, but he never came."

"That's just like him," cried Jones, all aglow with friendly admiration. "I could tell you worse things than that about him."

"Well don't do it," broke in Stanhope. "I'm glad to have met you, Doctor Garland, but that small matter on the Frisco train is not worth mentioning; I knew the fellows; they were black-listers, and I could have done no less. Anybody else could have done as much if they had known their men as I did."

"Oh, of course;" said Jones filliping his fingers in air, anyone could have done the same, *anyone*. Come, doctor, are you going to take us all in?"

"I think I must. Certainly Mr. Stanhope is the very man. He is more needed than I, no doubt. But if he likes to take a first look with me, and does not care to be known, I'll call him my student."

"I'm not in search of a case," said Stanhope, "and don't care to be known for what I am. But I'll go with you, doctor, and many thanks."

## CHAPTER L

### FOUL PLAY

There was no change in room 99, when Doctor Garland and the young men entered it, except that the bed, whereon the dead woman lay, had been drawn out from the alcove and now stood near the center of the room. Its still occupant lay just as when the clerk and the housekeeper came out and turned the key upon this carnival mystery.

Owing to some unaccustomed absence, for which the day was no doubt accountable, those officers of justice who are usually prompt to arrive upon such a scene, were still "conspicuous by their absence," and Doctor Garland's party found their arrival anxiously waited for.

Acting upon Stanhope's suggestion, the doctor went first to the room, accompanied only by young Baring.

"If upon seeing the woman you think it well to bring me in, I suppose you can easily do so. It may prove less a sensation than these people think it," Stanhope had said, and the doctor had nodded his agreement, and hastened after the clerk, who greeted them at the bottom of the stairs, while the host of the Victor waited in solemn anxiety at the top.

When they were within the room, the doctor went straight to the bedside and lifted one of the lifeless hands; twice and again he went from one side of the bed to the other, and if he lifted an arm or stirred in the least the soft laces about her shoulders, or the pillows upon which her head rested, he was careful to



replace it again, with quick eye, and accustomed touch.

His movements surprised the three, who looked on wonderingly. Somehow they were not just the movements they had looked for—from a physician. If Stanhope had been present he would have said that Doctor Garland was beginning more like a detective than a doctor.

When he had thus surveyed the bed and its burden, he moved away from it, and cast a rapid glance about the room. He noted its order, and let his eye rest for a moment upon the fur-trimmed cloak lying across the trunk in the recess. Then he turned and addressed the landlord:

"If you will kindly leave the room, all of you, and send up the taller of the two gentlemen who came with me, you will do me a favor. I do not hesitate to say to you Mr. Fauvier, that this looks like a bad case."

Mr. Fauvier was a true Southerner, and so, also, was Doctor Garland. Mr. Fauvier knew the doctor well, and esteemed him highly. In two minutes Stanhope tapped at the door of room 99, and being bidden to enter, found the doctor standing alone, with arms folded, beside the bed.

As he closed the door the doctor advanced.

"Mr. Stanhope," he said, "this is a case for *you*. Look at that woman, and tell me, if you think she ever laid herself down and composed herself to sleep, or to die, like *that*." He stepped aside and the detective walked toward the bed and looked down upon the still figure as it lay with the face turned from him; then he walked slowly around the bed and stood upon the opposite side, pausing near the foot to look again at the recumbent figure. As his eyes rested upon the white face, he started slightly, moved quickly forward, and bent to scrutinize it more closely; then the doctor saw him

start backward and bring his two hands upward in a gesture difficult to understand; again he gazed fixedly, moving backward, and then coming nearer; and all the while a growing excitement was manifest in his face.

The doctor was watching him narrowly, and when he finally lifted his eyes and said quietly:

"Will you send for Jones, Doctor Garland?" The doctor, now in full sympathy, went straight to the door and said to young Baring, who with the clerk had mounted guard in the hall:

"Ask Mr. Jones to come up, will you, Baring?"

In a moment the reporter appeared, and Doctor Garland, who had waited for him at the door, drew him inside and turned the key, which the clerk had slipped into the lock upon the inside, with a significant gesture.

"Jones," said Stanhope, standing still in the place where the doctor had left him, "come here, around here where I stand."

Solemn and wondering much, Jones came and stood beside him, and responsive to a gesture, fixed his eyes upon the face before him.

Then suddenly he turned and clutched Stanhope's arm with both hands.

"Stanhope!" he exclaimed breathlessly—"why, do you see!—is it—is it—" he broke off abruptly and began to thrust about in his pockets; so excited for the moment as to seem to have forgotten where to put his hand upon a large pocket-book, which, finally, he found and drew forth; while Stanhope, who evidently understood his movements, stood gravely by and waited.

When the reporter had opened the pocket-book and taken from it a cabinet photograph, Stanhope took it quietly from his hand saying:

"One moment, Jones; Doctor Garland will *you* look at this?"

The doctor came around to them and took the picture from the detective's hand, then for a moment there was utter stillness in the room while Stanhope and Jones watched the doctor's face narrowly.

A long steady look at the pictured face, a quick glance into the faces of his companions, and then Doctor Garland moved nearer the bed and looked again and again from the picture in his hand to the face upon the pillow. Then he turned again toward Stanhope.

"It is the original of the picture," he said in a tone of conviction.

"I'm afraid it is," said Stanhope. "If so, it's the end of a long search. I don't like to believe the evidence of my own senses; what did they tell you about this dead woman, doctor?"

"Nothing save that she was unknown, except by the name upon the register, which no doubt is fictitious, and that the party or parties who brought her here have abandoned her."

"Doctor," said Stanhope abruptly, "you sent for me—why?"

"Because there has been foul play. I think we shall prove that this woman died by poison. Do you not see that she lies as if placed there by other hands, not prone upon the back, with the chin elevated as would be natural, nor entirely upon the side, the head well over and chin a little depressed, but half-way between the two, in a most unnatural and uncomfortable position, with the head back and the chin elevated, the head and shoulders *held in position* by the pillows which have been adjusted for this purpose; you will perceive that the lower half of the body is *not turned*, but merely appears to be, by the disposition of the drapery."

"You think," asked Jones, while Stanhope stood look-



ing down at the body and seemingly absorbed in thought, "you think that she was poisoned?"

"I fear it," replied the doctor; "and, gentlemen, let me suggest that you keep anything that you have to say concerning the identity of this body, until the inquest is called; which will be—as soon as we have completed the examination."

"Doctor," said Stanhope, moving away from the bed and toward the door, "I find that I must take an active part in this business; your suggestion is good, and I will ask you to do me a favor."

"Name it."

"Introduce me at once to the proprietor of this house. I must get his consent, and make some investigations."

"I will introduce you with pleasure; Mr. Fauvier is my personal friend. Shall it be in—"

"In my professional character?" interposed Stanhope.  
"By all means."

## CHAPTER LI

### THE EVIDENCE OF A DETECTIVE

There was no indication of the gayety going on without, in the room where the dead girl lay, and where the coroner and his jury were assembled.

Strict oversight, and the well-known exclusiveness of the Hotel Victor, had kept out the throng of simply curious, and yet the room of death, and the other, which connected with it, and which for this occasion had been vacated by its occupants, and thrown open for the coroner's use, was full of grave, expectant faces.

A few of the Victor's guests were there, admitted by favor. There were reporters, representatives of the city's press, each intent upon adding a *soupçon* of horror to the carnival rehearsal in preparation for their respective journals. They were sharpening their pencils, and exchanging low voiced greetings and comments, with friendly bohemianism—all save one, who was seated aloof from the rest, and with true American enterprise, and keen pointed Faber, had already written at the top of a page in his note-book this startling head-line:

### "A DEAD QUEEN OF CARNIVAL

#### THE MYSTERY OF MARDI GRAS,"

this auspicious beginning proving him possessed of at least one of the gifts that go to the making of the successful writer of sensational romances.

There were two or three physicians, brother practitioners, well-known and capable, called by request of Doctor Garland, to corroborate such testimony as he was able to give, and a group of servants of the house, some called as witnesses, others at hand to do such services as might be required of them.

Doctor Garland stood, with young Baring, his assistant, a little aloof, conversing in low tones with the other physicians; and on the opposite side of the room, Mr. Fauvier, Stanhope and Jones stood together, saying little, but seeming to understand each other. The coroner, too, had been in conversation with Stanhope, and it was noticeable that from time to time, as the inquest progressed, he consulted, in turn, a slip of paper which he held in his hand, and the face of the detective.

The first witness called was the day-clerk, who told of the discovery of the body, and his subsequent inquiries concerning the entry upon the register.

"Room 99 was taken more than a month ago. The entry upon the register is in my handwriting. I have no recollection of the manner in which the room was secured; probably it was by telegraph; whether the telegram, if it was a telegram, came from New York City, or from some other point, I would not have been likely to take note. I was not on duty when the occupants of room 99 arrived. No. I was *not* present during the investigation which followed the discovery of the body. I entered the room with Doctors Garland and Baring, and when Doctor Garland asked for that gentleman," pointing to Stanhope, "I left the room and did not enter it again until the opening of this inquiry."

The night-clerk was next called.

"Yes," he said, "I remember about 99, distinctly. I was thinking that the house must be already overfull, and that my night would be easy; I had not been on watch more than an hour when he came."



"He?" said the coroner.

"Yes, sir. An expressman it was, or a drayman. He brought that trunk; it had a card, with 'Mr. and Mrs. Jones, N. Y.,' written in ink upon it." The witness pointed toward the trunk which still stood in the recess.

"Go on," said the coroner.

"He was an honest looking fellow, and he said that the gentleman that had taken room 99 had sent him on with the trunk. The gentleman was to take supper with a party of friends, and he said that the room was to be made ready for him. I thought it must be all right, the name on the trunk corresponded with that on the register. I sent a porter to take the trunk to this room."

"What became of the key?" asked the coroner.

"The porter brought it back, I am sure, and I put it in its usual place. We are very particular about these things."

"Do you remember who came for it?"

"No. I can't remember. After twelve o'clock they began to pour in, half a dozen at a time, and called for their keys; I suppose this man must have come in with a party—he could easily have done so. He did not register."

"Then you can't remember anything about this key?"

"Nothing," said the clerk, regretfully.

"Is this a common occurrence?" asked the coroner, somewhat severely. "Are you apt to let guests go and come with so little notice?"

"It is not a common occurrence;" said the clerk with dignity, "but the occasion was unusual; we were overworked, overcrowded. I don't think that my employers would consider me culpably careless, sir."

"That will do."

The clerk turned away, and encountering the approv-

ing eye of his employer, bowed his acknowledgment, and passed to his place.

The coroner consulted his slip of paper, and then looked up.

"Is Mr.—Mr. Henry Weston in the room?" he asked.

A young man with a round and convivial face came promptly forward, and confronted the coroner.

"Are you the young man who sent Mr. Fauvier your card?" asked the coroner.

"I sent Mr. Fauvier my card, yes, sir," said the witness briskly.

"Is this the card?" he extended a card to the young man who took it, looked at it, turned it over, and then said:

"That is the card, your honor."

"Upon this card you have written that you have some testimony to offer. What is it?"

Mr. Weston's testimony was most interesting.

"I have been here three days," he said, "taking in the city; yesterday I went out early in the afternoon with a party of friends, and did not come back until after midnight; we had been going about pretty lively, and only came in to recruit our toilets a little before going down to the ball on Rampart Street. We came into the office, all clamoring for our keys, about as this gentleman," bowing toward the night-clerk, "has described it; I think it very probable that the occupant of this room took advantage of our noisy entrance to secure his key."

"Have you a reason for that opinion?"

"I have. The others—there were five of us—went up ahead of me; I lingered behind for two or three minutes, as nearly as I can guess; when I started from the office the house seemed very quiet; almost every one must have been out on the street, or dancing somewhere; it was late to be going out, and early to be coming in.

When I got to the foot of the stairs I saw a man almost at the top; he was going up and he carried a woman in his arms."

There was a stir and profound sensation in the room; all looked startled, or surprised, except Mr. Fauvier and Richard Stanhope.

"Go on," said the coroner, after a moment's pause.

"I had better say, in partial explanation of my lack of memory, that we had all imbibed a little, and I suppose my head was not quite clear; my room is on the hall below this one; and I was just about to pass the man with his burden, when he stopped at this door, and pushed it open with his foot; as he turned to go in I distinctly saw a glimmer of scarlet drapery underneath a fur-trimmed cloak, and one hand and arm half bare, hanging loosely over his arm. I was much astonished, and stopped at the door.

"I think I was about to go boldly in and proffer my assistance, when the man appeared in the doorway and said in a very courteous manner: Sir, my wife has fainted from a fright in the street; will you kindly run downstairs and ask them to send me a pitcher of ice-water at once?—It will be the quickest way."

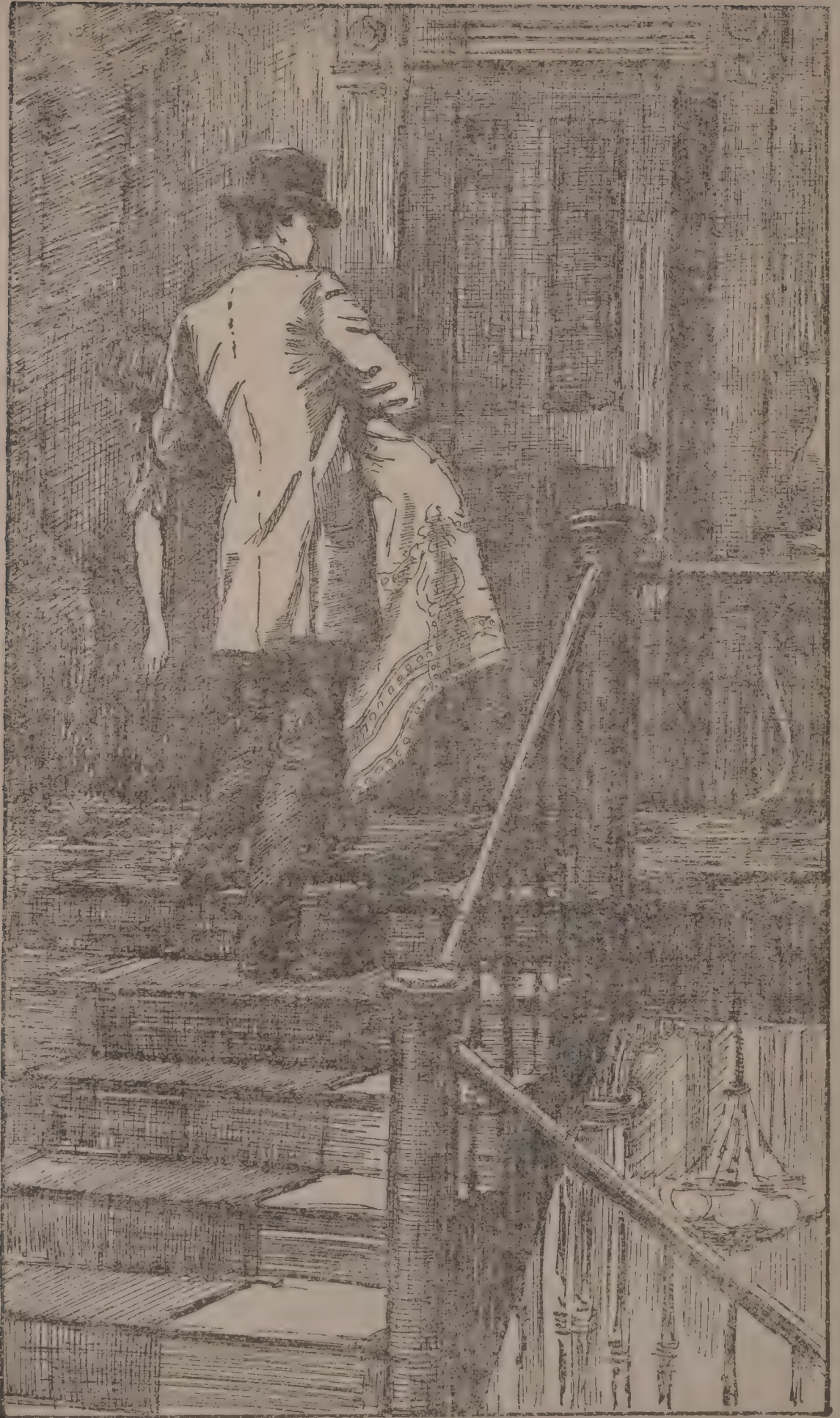
"I rushed downstairs and ordered the water; when I came back the door was closed, and I heard my companions calling to me from the next landing. I hurried on to my room, and in a few moments they all came clamoring in. I hastened my preparations, and we went out. I did not even think of the sick woman again; and I did not come in until noon to day; then I heard of this affair, and sent my card at once to Mr. Fauvier here."

The coroner turned and pointed toward the bed.

"Would you know the woman?" he asked.

"No; her head was muffled in something, a veil I should think. I was sure of nothing but the cloak and the red drapery."





“HE WAS GOING UP, AND HE CARRIED A WOMAN IN HIS ARMS.”  
—Slender Clue, p. 470.



"Look at that body if you please."

The witness approached the bed and looked down.

"It is the red drapery," he said, "I am sure of it."

"And the cloak?"

Doctor Garland's assistant came forward and held the fur-trimmed cloak up to view.

"It was such a garment," said the witness. "I can't speak as to the shape of course, but it looked like that."

"Can you describe the man?"

"Not definitely. He did not seem to me much above the medium height; he walked firmly, even with his burden; he wore a long loose fitting outer coat. Hat of soft felt, pulled well down over his eyebrows. I can't say much for his face, except that he had a profusion of black hair and beard. But I was impressed with his voice, which was very courteous indeed. He spoke like a man of culture and refinement."

The servant who received the order for water from the accommodating witness, was called, and came forward at a signal from Mr. Fauvier.

His testimony was brief and explanatory.

"I came up with the water at once," he said, "but the young man had made a mistake I suppose, anyway I was told to go to room 90, and there I went. I knocked two or three times, and then tried the door; it was locked. I tried the next room, and that was locked; then I took back the pitcher, thinking someone had played me a trick."

The witness was dismissed, and the coroner drew himself more erect in his chair, while the gravity of his countenance increased. He consulted the paper in his hand, seemed to consider for a moment, and then called for Richard Stanhope. When the young man came forward it was evident to the reporters in the further



room from that, that an important witness was before them. Doctor Garland and his assistant exchanged glances, and drew closer together; Mr. Fauvier came nearer the coroner, and Mr. Jones, the reporter, showed signs of increasing interest.

While Stanhope was making his way forward, there was a stir and some whispering among the jury, and one of them leaned forward and said:

"I think, Mr. Coroner, that there are a few other questions to be put to those witnesses you have just dismissed. This gentleman at my right wants to know—"

"The witnesses are *not* dismissed," replied the coroner calmly. "In good time the jury shall have opportunity to question any or all of the witnesses."

The spokesman for the jury subsided into his chair, and the gentleman on his right, a little eager-faced person, looked quenched but not satisfied.

"Mr. Stanhope," said the coroner gravely, "I think it well be well to begin by informing the gentlemen of the jury in regard to yourself, your residence and profession."

Stanhope bowed to the coroner and the gentlemen of the jury.

"I do not usually speak of myself as a professional character," he said smiling; "my calling is that of a detective, and I am too much of a rover to call any one place my home. I have been a detective since my boyhood, and my life has been pretty evenly divided between the great cities of the North. Perhaps I have given the preference to New York and Chicago."

"Are you willing to make known the nature of the business that brought you to New Orleans?"

"Perfectly; my visit is 'professional.' I have been engaged much of the time since May last searching for a missing girl, or for some news of her. She disappeared

from her home in the North on the eve of her wedding, and there has been much difference of opinion as to her probable fate; there was some pretty strong evidence of foul play, for there was a discarded and revengeful lover in the case; but there was quite as much to indicate that she had preferred to run away rather than be married; a second party was put upon guard over the suspected lover, and I began a search through various cities. As an aid in my search, we caused a large number of photographs to be copied from one which was in the possession of this same lover, and these I sent to detectives and heads of bureaus in various cities. I also sent one to a friend of mine, a reporter in New York, one Mr. Lewis Jones."

There was a little ripple of excitement; young Jones was known to most of the reporters. Baring turned toward him with a look of surprise and increased expectancy, and one reporter leaned toward another and whispered—

"He's making thunder for that fellow Jones. That fellow's a sharp one."

"Umph!" returned the other. "Making thunder for himself, more likely, looking out for a fat job. Do you call it sharp to give away his business? supposing that it's true—his story?"

"Hist!" cautioned the first speaker. "That witness knows what he's about."

"If your honor and the jury are willing," resumed Stanhope, "I would like to give my story, or as much of it as is required, in my own way. I will answer all necessary questions afterward."

The coroner looked up. There were nods of assent from the jury, and Stanhope resumed:

"Mr. Jones found or thought he had found traces of this missing girl in New York, and I went there; but the

clue was lost, or the girl was gone. Mr. Jones and I continued to correspond; and less than two weeks ago, while I was in Omaha, I received a hasty note from him; he was already established in this city, and wrote to inform me that he believed he had seen the girl I was in search of upon the streets here, and advising me to come at once, which I did. The rooms which Mr. Jones and I occupy in common are opposite or nearly opposite those of Doctor Garland, and it was through his courtesy that I was admitted to this room."

"Mr. Fauvier tells me," said the Coroner slowly, having first consulted the paper in his hand, "that, acting upon Doctor Garland's suggestion, and previous to the medical examination, you made a thorough examination of the room; what did you discover?"

"Very little; it is more than probable that the man who carried the woman, as described by Mr. Weston, simply laid the body upon the bed and left it there, making good his escape. Everything indicates that the affair was planned, and executed according to program. The trunk standing there contains a few articles of clothing, unmarked, and of the kind that can be bought in any shop, some current magazines, and a good many newspapers. I think it probable that it was never used, and perhaps never owned, by the person or persons who brought it here. It was simply a part of the program. When I assisted the doctor to lift the body from the bed, a small roll of bank-bills fell from the folds of her garments. The money had evidently been so placed that it would naturally be discovered by those to whom the body was given in charge. Nothing had been disturbed; the chambermaid declares the room, with the exception of the bed and the trunk, is precisely as she left it."

"And this is all that you discovered?" asked the coroner.



"It is not all. When Doctor Garland sent for me, I came to see a woman unknown, nameless, abandoned in death to the mercy of strangers. Doctor Garland, thinking that he saw something peculiar in the posture of the body, called me to the bedside, and I saw"—he lifted his hand to a pocket in the breast of his coat—"I saw what I believed to be the body of the girl I have been searching after for more than half a year."

He drew from the pocket a large envelope and handed it to the coroner.

"That is the picture of Bertha Warham," he said. "Doctor Garland, Mr. Jones, and Mr. Fauvier are all of my opinion. Your honor can judge for yourself."

## CHAPTER LII

### THE DOCTOR'S EVIDENCE

In the long silence that ensued, the coroner arose and went with the picture in his hand toward the bed. Then, slowly, one by one, obedient to his gesture, the jurymen approached the still form, passed the picture from hand to hand, and gazed awe-stricken.

The limbs of the dead had been composed as if for burial; some of the unseemly carnival trappings had been removed, and the hair had been shorn of its decorations and arrayed after the manner of that in the picture. This had been done at Stanhope's suggestion, and it completed the likeness. Between a pictured face and a dead one, there could not be a closer resemblance.

When the coroner and the jury had looked their fill and retaken their places, others present were permitted to look, and to compare; the photograph passed from hand to hand as before, and when all was summed up, there was no dissenting voice. The face of the dead and the face of the picture were pronounced identical.

When at last they were all again in their places the coroner called Doctor Garland, who came forward gravely.

He told his story in brief, terse sentences—how he had been summoned by Mr. Fauvier, and how, having met Detective Richard Stanhope—and knowing something of his skill, he had thought it well to ask him to be present at the examination. He rehearsed in his turn, for the benefit of the jury, the story of the iden-

tification, and told how, at his request, as well as by that of Mr. Fauvier, the detective had made a minute examination of the premises.

"When that was done," said the doctor, "it became my business to ascertain if possible the manner in which the unfortunate young woman came to her death. It was the theory of Mr. Stanhope, that a poison had been administered before she was brought into this house, and from certain signs, visible only to a practiced eye, I was inclined to agree with him. The examination was thorough, and satisfactory. When Mr. Baring and myself had assured ourselves of the cause of death, we called in these other medical gentlemen, who confirmed our belief, and are ready to add their testimony to ours. Gentlemen, that young woman died by poison administered hypodermically. If the jury desires it I am ready to demonstrate."

"Were you able to discover when the poison was administered?" asked one of the jurymen.

"Easily; the hypodermic dose of sulphate of morphia was administered, without doubt, between the hours of eleven and twelve. She was in the death-sleep, if not quite dead, when she was brought here."

At this point there was a consultation among the jurymen, and Doctor Garland was requested to demonstrate his theory.

He beckoned to young Baring, who came promptly forward and put into his hand a small leathern case, which he opened and passed to the jurymen nearest him. When it had passed, like the photograph from hand to hand, the doctor took it again, and taking out the small steel cylinder of a hypodermic syringe, and fitting the needle upon it, gave it back to the jury for inspection.

"This, gentlemen," he said, while, one after another,



they viewed it, "is a hypodermic syringe. Science has found it possible to extract the active principles, or properties, of many drugs, so that a very little of the new extract shall be equal in power to a great deal of the old.

"From opium we can get by the help of chemicals a fine white powder, which is called sulphate of morphia. This powder is much stronger than the opium from which it is made, and it dissolves in water easily. By adding water we can get a solution which may contain in one teaspoonful, twelve grains, or even more, of morphia, so that this little syringe will hold over thirty full doses, or twelve times as much as it would take to kill a strong man.

"If you found a person dead an hour after this was administered, you would hardly be able to tell, by ordinary chemical analysis, what caused that death; unless you were familiar with this instrument, you might never guess at the truth.

"If I draw a few drops of the morphia solution into this instrument, and insert the needle under the skin of the arm, the shoulder, any part of the body in fact, it causes sleep, and gives ease from pain. A little more will cause, in most patients, nauseating sickness; a few drops more, and the patient falls into a deep sleep from which he never wakens. As I have said, this instrument leaves scarcely a trace of its work; but there will always be, upon some part of the body, the mark of the needle, scarcely visible in some, and only to be discovered by the touch. Such a mark the patient bears upon her arm, and there are also several small hard spots, not larger than a very small pea, and very slightly discolored; they are so many evidences that the hypodermic dose was not administered last night for the first time. Gentlemen, this young woman died between the hours of

eleven and twelve last night, from a poisonous dose of morphia hypodermically administered. In this opinion these other medical gentlemen will agree with me. Beyond this all is conjecture. I think that my work ends here."

When Doctor Garland retired to his seat, there was renewed excitement among his auditors; the jurymen drew close together and whispered eagerly; the coroner consulted with Mr. Fauvier and Stanhope; the reporters wrote furiously.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said the coroner at last, "we will hear the corroborative evidence of these medical gentlemen—of Mr. Fauvier and others; after that I think it will be well to listen to Mr. Stanhope's account of this Bertha Warham, and his search for her."

Nothing new was learned from the witnesses, the two physicians, young Baring, Mr. Fauvier, the housekeeper, and two or three of the servants of the house. Their words strengthened the evidence given by the clerks, Mr. Weston, Stanhope, and Doctor Garland; and they did no more.

Then, at length, from the beginning, Stanhope told the story of Bertha Warham's disappearance—of his search for her in various cities, and his reasons for believing that the girl, in search of a career, had fallen into the hands of a new enemy; and ended by proffering a request that the jury should take means to make known, through the press, and in other ways, the appearance of the dead woman, and give all opportunity for identification. Meanwhile he would procure assistance, and, aided by the photograph, would search the city hotels, boarding houses—all places where strangers were received; and if, at the expiration of a fixed time, no one came forward to contradict or to confirm the identification, he desired that the body might be delivered

over to him, to be taken North for interment in the Warham burial-place at Upton.

After the usual deliberation, and rather more than the usual display of argumentative wisdom, on the part of the jury, the coroner brought in his verdict, viz:

"That the deceased, believed upon evidence to be one Bertha Warham, late of Upton, died by poison, at the hands of parties unknown; and the jury recommended that the body be given into the custody of detective Richard Stanhope, who had been able to convince them of his fitness for such a trust."

For three days, advertisements were conspicuous in the papers, and posters flared about the city, while especially appointed officers searched in boarding houses and hotels armed with hastily made copies of Bertha Warham's picture. But nothing came of it.



## CHAPTER LIII

### ENLISTING AN AMATEUR

Stanhope's first act, upon leaving the Victor, where the jury still sat in council, was to telegraph to Carnes as follows:

*"Body of young woman lying at Hotel Victor believed to be B. W. Hold yourself ready to go to Upton with news upon receipt of next message. S."*

This done, he rejoined Jones, Doctor Garland and young Baring, at their lodgings, where by previous arrangement, they were to sup together, in the doctor's rooms.

The events of the day had put them out of harmony with the festivities that were still in progress, the noises of the streets, their shouts, and peals of laughter; and bursts of music, now near, now far away, fell upon their ears without rousing them to listen, or to comment. Even Baring, the youngest of the party, full of joyous youth and health and fond of the carnival gayeties, through not having known them too long, turned a deaf ear to the sounds of revelry.

After supper they sat about the table smoking, all but Doctor Garland who never smoked, and talking about the dead girl at the Victor.

Stanhope had touched very lightly, in telling his story before the coroner's jury, upon that part of it which concerned Joseph Larsen; and had not mentioned his friend Carnes by name, only assuring the jury that the discarded lover was not, and could not be, the unknown

assassin, inasmuch as he was at that time an inmate of an insane asylum—genuinely insane.

He had made no mention of Lucretia Warham, and her tragic death—and he made no mention of her now—but he responded to their interest in the affair, and their evident friendliness for himself, by telling them of Joseph Larsen; of his maneuvers in the city, among the hack-drivers and street-venders, and by giving them his modest version of Larsen's appearance at the Warham farm-house, in the storm and darkness, making as little as possible of his own part in the affair, but posing Susan in a most advantageous light; and from this they naturally drifted into speculations about the murder.

"I suppose you have no idea that this fellow may have set an assassin upon her track—that notion would be far-fetched wouldn't it?" suggested Doctor Garland.

"In this case it would," replied Stanhope, "as the phrase is, the fellow had 'no money and no influence,' at least not enough to reach so far, and over so great a length of time. No, since I've found her here I am more than half-inclined to think that Larsen may have been merely raving when he told me that story. His conduct was *not* particularly sane from the first."

"I should think not," said the doctor meditatively.

"No. I'm inclined to think that we've all been off the track. We've got to begin over. If it turns out that Larsen had from first to last, no hand in her disappearance, after all, it will not surprise me; neither will it startle me if it comes out, that she *did* give him the slip in Chicago—evidently there's another man in the case."

"It looks like it," again said the doctor.

Young Baring leaned across the table and looked into Stanhope's face.

"You have a theory?" he said interrogatively.

"Yes, or the outline of one. I can fancy how such a

girl as Bertha Warham might become almost a menace to a man—might provoke either love or hate. She must have been very hard to deceive, and having been deceived, very formidable; she was a keen-witted, clever girl, worldly-wise beyond her years. Ergo, if we ever find the man who killed her, we'll find him a clever fellow, shrewder than she, and that means a great deal. Then, do you think that a common assassin could have devised and executed such a plot as this? Fancy it! They must have driven about, half the evening, mingling with the maskers; probably she was merry, and he pretended to be; women in melancholy mood don't go about tricked out as she was—this is theory, remember—when it grew late enough he must have administered what she thought to be a mere soothing dose. She had not been confused with wine, you gentlemen expressly declare?"

"No," said the doctor, "there were no evidences of wine; she had partaken of a light supper, that was all."

"Well, let us say then that while in the carriage he gave her this soothing dose, she submitting, perhaps wishing it. Or, let us say that he simply clapped a chloroformed handkerchief to her face and then applied the morphia. Mind, this looks improbable to me, for if he had chloroform, why use both drugs? But he was certainly a man of nerve and brains; he had sent the trunk ahead, the room had been secured, perhaps for a different use in the beginning—when she was under the influence of the drug he had only to put his head out of the carriage window and say, 'my wife is ill, drive to the 'Victor.' When they arrived, a sufficient fee slipped into the hand of the driver would disarm curiosity; he could say again, 'wait here,' rush in and secure his key, and, when he came out be surprised to find that his wife had fainted. Now a steady nerve, a light quick foot, and the game is his. If Mr. Weston was not mistaken in



saying that he opened the door with his foot, the fellow must have had the nerve to go upstairs and unlock the door before going back to the carriage—running the risk in being away too long, of the hackman's curiosity, or humanity, getting the best of professional indifference. But see how he succeeded! Of one thing I am convinced: he knew his ground; he had looked it over. If he had not understood the arrangement of the offices and corridors and stairways of the 'Victor' he could never have carried out his plan with such dispatch. He knew where to go without making a false step, and he knew *when* to go. He was familiar with the habits of *Mardi gras*."

"Yes," again assented Doctor Garland; "you must be right."

"Such a man will be hard to catch—" went on Stanhope. "He will know how to make difficulties."

"But," interposed young Baring eagerly, "they must have harbored somewhere in the city. It won't be impossible to find the place—for you."

"No, we can find the place no doubt, but mark me—when we *do* find it we will find new difficulties; our second state will be worse than our first; if we don't strike a misleading clue—we will find ourselves simply baffled. These are the cases that try us! One man of resources, when he sees fit to turn his attention to villainy and put his wit to wrong uses, can make us more trouble than a dozen ordinary criminals."

A few moments later, Jones arose and said half-regretfully, half-whimsically:

"In the interest of the 'organ' for which I blow, I must leave you, gentlemen. When one has to cover a given number of sheets of paper, it requires less mental effort if he does not have to draw upon his imagination too severely."

He had scarcely quitted the room when Doctor Gar-

land was called out; there had been an accident upon the street, and Stanhope and young Baring were left smoking in company.

"I shall go back to the 'Victor,' presently," said the former. "Don't stay here on my account, Mr. Baring, if you can find anything to interest you outside."

"I'm out of humor for fun to-night," said Baring, tossing his cigar upon the ash-plate, and clasping his hands behind his head, while he turned to regard his companion with eager interest. "Mr. Stanhope, I wish I could do something to help this thing on. I am pretty well acquainted with the ins and outs of this city. You know I'm a Northerner, and coming here full of ideas about New Orleans and its history I dare say I've prowled about and explored until I know more of the by-ways than many a native. I don't think I've had bad motives, but I guess I've been into some pretty tough localities here, and I'm tolerably well acquainted too—here and there. Now why couldn't I join in this search of the city?"

Stanhope was smoking placidly, his eyes scanning the face before him—a half-smile, provoked by the young fellow's headlong eagerness, which, by the bye, he understood and rather liked, upon his lips.

"You *could*," he said, "if you have the time and inclination—it's more delicate work though than you might fancy. It won't do to provoke suspicion. That might spoil all."

"No," said Baring; "that's the idea I had in my mind—I think I might investigate in some quarters better than a stranger could."

He was a fine-looking young fellow, not so tall as Stanhope, and more squarely built; there was a sturdy naturalness about him, an erect straightforward cheeriness that was very pleasing. One of these fortunate, happy tem-

peraments that win upon people and hold their vantage ground; Kenneth Baring, stranded anywhere, would be sure to make friends soon, and many. Stanhope was instinctively telling himself this, as he sat opposite the young man; and he felt strongly attracted toward him. His own independent, fearless spirit recognized a kindred one. Time and experience had taught him reserve; and when reserve was needful, his cool independence was his natural cloak for it. But now he was as frank and good-humored as Baring, if not as eager, when he said:

"I'm inclined to accept your offer, Baring. A man is not necessarily a bad detective because he's an amateur."

"Well," said Baring, "I think I might have done something in your line, may be, if I had had the right kind of a start. As it is, I'm wedded to medicine. But I'm fond of investigating, experimenting. Now I like the microscope—don't you?"

Stanhope laughed. "I don't think there's a scientific hair in my head," he said, "but I like to see what the microscope can show me."

"Well," said Baring, rising and stretching himself, "I've got a splendid one—I'm one of a little clique of fellows who like to ride a hobby, now and then. We've got a new one just now. Barker, that's one of us, has almost converted us to some novel beliefs that he holds about human hair. He thinks there's *character* in it; its texture, quantity, color, all mean something. I don't go so far as Barker, not yet, but I'm interested in the color question. It's a common fallacy that hair must be either black or white, light brown or dark, red, yellow or gray. Now we have secured and classified already twenty-nine distinct shades of blonde hair; *blonde* mind you, not brown or red, and I think I am going to add a thirtieth shade to the columns. You



may not have noticed it, but I managed to secure a few stray threads from the head of that poor girl to-day—it's of a rare color."

He took a folded bit of paper from his pocket, opened it and displayed, upon the palm of his hand, a tiny coil of yellow threads, not a dozen hairs in all. "I'm going to put this under the instrument," he said.

"Well," said Stanhope, consulting his watch, "I've learned a new thing—thirty shades of blonde! No wonder, we poor fellows are puzzled. I think I'll go up to the Victor, Baring; do you care too keep me company? I shall try to hang on until that jury arrives at a conclusion."

The jury had not arrived at a conclusion when they reached the Victor, and as the prospect of their so doing seemed remote, the two young men agreed to take a turn upon the brilliant street. As they emerged from the great building a man who had seemed in the act of entering, stopped and turned to look at them.

Over his shoulder young Baring saw the movement, and half-halted, but the stranger quickly averted his gaze, and seeming to abandon his design of entering the hotel, walked briskly down the street.

As the man passed them, he noticed a broad ray of light, shining out from the office window and, in it, the stranger's profile stood out for an instant vividly distinct.

With a smothered ejaculation, Stanhope started forward, as if to follow, then checked himself and drew back.

"Anything wrong?" queried Baring.

Stanhope gave a short laugh.

"If you could tell me just why I made that move," he said, "you would do me a favor!"

"Instinct," suggested Baring.

"Superstition, more likely. But now that I think, I

believe it must have been a fancied resemblance. That one sharp glimpse of his face as he passed us—well, when I see him again, I shall know him, I dare say. One gets these fancies sometimes from carrying a picture gallery in one's head. I wonder if I *have* seen that fellow before, and where? The fact is, Baring, this is the second puzzling resemblance I have encountered to-day, and they both give me a queer sensation of responsibility; I feel as if I were wronging myself, or somebody else, through not being able to bring my memory to time."

On the following morning, Stanhope received a long letter from Rufus Carnes.

"The prosecution of 'Charles Jenkins' still hangs fire," it said, "thanks to the lawyer I have been able to secure. But this sort of thing can't last forever. Jenkins persists in keeping us in the dark concerning his identity. He is gaining in health—and in obstinacy. If we can't bring him to terms soon we shall not be able to save him. Sharp & Co. have patched together a strong net-work of circumstantial evidence.

"As for Larsen, his case looks more hopeful; there is now a prospect that he may recover his reason; there will always be danger of relapse, the doctors say. But let them patch him up so that he can give lucid testimony, so that I can compel him to save this unfortunate, obstinate Jenkins, and he may end his days in an insane asylum if he prefers that to the gallows. Justice first—etc. I have no mercy for the murderer of his mother.

"According to your request I have informed myself about matters at Upton. Old man Warham is in a very critical state of health—that is to say, his recovery is deemed impossible; his death, only a question of

time. How clever the doctors are! As if we did not all labor under some disease, mental, moral, or physical; from which recovery is impossible. As if the end for all of us were not merely—a matter of time.

"I am anxious to hear from you. Have been wondering what took you to New Orleans; was it the carnival? or have you struck again the trail of your *ignis fatuus*?"

This is a portion of the letter which Stanhope received, soon after his telegram to Carnes was read by that astonished philosopher; and two days later, another message went flying northward:

"B. W. was found dead, by poison, at Hotel Victor, yesterday. Go to Upton and prepare them. I start with the body to-night. STANHOPE."



## CHAPTER LIV

### PUZZLING RESEMBLANCES

Richard Stanhope saw the body of Bertha Warham laid to rest in the pretty tree-shaded cemetery at Upton, and passed three dreary days at the Warham farm-house, where John Warham, his mind now sorrowfully at rest concerning the fate of his youngest and favorite daughter, seemed to have lost his motive for living, and lay stoically fading out of life, watched over by the faithful Susan, who was now lady paramount at the farm-house.

During the weeks that had passed since the arrest of Charlie Jenkins, Stanhope had given some thought to the sad plight of this unfortunate, having been put in possession of all the points by Carnes; and before he left Upton he had asked Susan for a private audience, and told her of the arrest of "Jenkins," and of the web of circumstantial evidence that might prove strong enough to jeopardize life, if help in some form were not forthcoming.

"I have not seen this 'Jenkins,'" he concluded, "but my friend seems to think well of him, in spite of his self-abandonment; and believing as we both do that Joseph Larsen is the murderer of Mrs. Warham, we feel that we *must* save the man in some way. Now if this case comes to trial before Larsen recovers, if he does recover, may we count upon your evidence? You understand, of course that if Larsen does not confess, we must make out a case against him that will at least affect the testimony Sharp & Co. will bring in. If the

case comes into court, my friend and I must come forward and tell what *we* know about this affair, and we can certainly make out as strong a case against Larsen as they have found against this Jinkins—with your help."

"If I am called upon to tell what I know," said Susan stanchly, "I shall tell it—I think that Joe Larsen killed his aunt Lucretia, and I believe he's at the bottom of all poor Bertha's troubles."

Stanhope looked at her keenly; he believed that she knew more than she was prepared to admit. Her utter want of curiosity when Larsen went into that last fit of madness beside the coffin of his mother, and his knowledge of her keen observation and native shrewdness, made him sure that she knew, or surmised, the truth.

After a moment's thought he said: "You were witness to Mrs. Warham's will?"

"How did you know that?" she asked quickly.

Stanhope smiled.

"Perhaps I guessed it. Am I right?"

Susan nodded.

"And you knew the purport of the will?"

"Yes."

"Do you know why it is not forthcoming?"

"Yes. Lucretia had a queer whim. The will is safe enough; she did not want it produced or opened until she had been dead six months."

"Do you think that Larsen knew this?"

"I am sure he did *not*."

"Now listen! this is my belief: When they met in the city, Larsen and Mrs. Warham, I believe that, for some reason she told him that she had made him her sole heir. Perhaps she wanted to influence him, to win him over from his madness about Miss Warham. But, I believe that he said to himself, 'If I kill her, her money

may help me to win Bertha back!' If he had known that he would have to wait six months for his fortune he might not have taken her life."

"Oh," interpolated Susan, "that might have *made* him take it—in a fit of rage."

Stanhope studied a square in the carpet for a moment, and then said with seeming carelessness, watching her face furtively the while:

"Why did she choose him for her heir, do you suppose?"

He saw her quick lift of the head, a sudden guarded movement, and smiled slightly as she said sharply:

"They're related."

"Are they?" suddenly meeting her eye fully. "How, Miss Susan?"

She looked at him fixedly for a moment, then—

"If that poor shiftless fellow in jail comes to trial, and it seems necessary, I'll tell all I know to save him. Isn't that what you want, young man?"

"That is *all* I want," he said, and he knew, by the firm closing of her lips, that it was all he would get—in the way of information—at that time, on that subject.

Before noon on the following day he was closeted with Carnes, listening to all that he had to tell and telling all that had not yet been told. They talked much of Bertha Warham and her tragic fate; Carnes was puzzled and disturbed; it was out of harmony with all his beliefs and theories, this ghastly fact that had confronted Richard Stanhope so unexpectedly in the Carnival City.

They talked of Larsen who was beginning to have intervals of calm that were almost like sanity—the intervals growing longer with each recurrence.

"They won't allow me to talk with him yet," said Carnes. "This is the critical time—they say. Nothing



must remind him of the past in any of its unpleasant phases until he has passed a rigid examination and the exact state of his nervous system ascertained. It's villainously slow—this business."

"Well," argued Stanhope, "it looks reasonable; the man will need a supply of nerve, as well as his senses, not to be driven back into delirium by such an accusation as you will bring against him. He's an ill-balanced creature at his best—more than half-wild animal. I tell you old man, I'm tired of theorizing about these people. I'm going back to New Orleans, to dig for *facts*."

"And I," said Carnes ruefully, "needs must stay here to wait for facts to develop. By George! I wish *you* would see that stubborn fellow Jinkins! There's the calmness of despair for you! The fellow's been down on his back so long that he obstinately refuses to be helped up. He don't believe in *any* of us—except perhaps, after a fashion, in Circus Fan."

Stanhope made no reply; he scarcely seemed to have heard him, but sat with his eyes fixed upon an ink-spot on the table-cover near his elbow.

"Well," said Carnes testily, "if you're gone back to New Orleans *already*—"

"There's something connected with my investigation—if you want to call them investigations—at the Victor, that has plagued me more than a little. I couldn't speak of it there and didn't want to—but I can't get my mind off it." Stanhope spoke musingly, not heeding the comment of his friend.

"What's that, Dick?"

"When I began to look about the room where the body lay, about the first thing I did was to lift up the cloak—you know—"

Carnes nodded.

"As I told you it lay across a new-looking trunk, almost covering it; well sir, when my eyes fell upon that *trunk* I almost jumped; it looked as natural, as familiar to me as the face of an old acquaintance; I almost caught myself saying 'how d'ye do?' You know one gets those notions sometimes and then they wear off, but *my* notion didn't; every time I saw that trunk it was the same familiar puzzle. I'm sure I've seen it *somewhere*—long before it appeared to me in New Orleans."

Carnes laughed, "It's a new thing for *you* to indulge in notions, Dick. Now listen to something practical: Don't you remember that you spent several weeks more than a year ago in spotting trunk-thieves? wasn't that it? I remember that you discoursed very learnedly about the physiognomy of things, especially of trunks. Now don't you think that this trunk in question may have come under your eye in the course of its travels, when you were especially interested in trunks and consequently very observant of their peculiarities?"

"Upon my word, Carnes, I hadn't thought of that! A man *can't* think of everything; and you may be right. It is the most practical of explanations. I wonder if you would account for the other in the same way."

"The other what?"

"The other puzzling resemblance."

"Another familiar-faced trunk?"

"No, this was a man. I had just a glimpse of him in front of the Hotel Victor, the night of the inquest, a regular-featured blonde, straight-stepping sort of a fellow; he only gave me a profile view, and got out of the way, but I felt just as I did about the trunk, sure that I had seen him before, without knowing where, confound him!"

"Well," said Carnes, "I've been wondering if we weren't losing our cunning; everything looks like it. I thought *you* never forgot a face, Dick."

"I *thought* so too," said Stanhope ruefully. Old man, we *have* been getting the worst of it ever since this Warham puzzle first broke upon us."

"Well," said Carnes, with a gleam of amusement breaking over his face, "*my* mind is made up—if my luck don't change *soon*, I shall take to—preaching."

"You'd better turn highwayman," advised Stanhope "It's fully as lucrative, and you'll keep your reputation longer."

"True, but you forget there's Sharp & Company."



## CHAPTER LV

### A STARTLING SCIENTIFIC TRUTH

Stanhope went back to New Orleans, and for nearly two months Carnes heard nothing from him that could be called news, and the same might be said with the positions reversed; Carnes had little or no news to impart to Stanhope.

Then one day there came a ripple upon the surface of this calm in the shape of a letter—it was from Stanhope and read as follows:

"DEAR OLD MAN:—At last our sails are ruffled by a slight—very slight breeze. Don't begin to glow, it's only a clue after all; and this is the story, much or little:

"It seems that young Baring—I think I wrote you that he had set out for home, before I came back here—had laid out a sort of line of march, and fixed upon several points which he thought might for one reason or another prove especially worthy of attention. Well, we found that the mistress of a certain pretty cottage, in a secluded section, which I will name to you with other details when we meet, left her cottage *on the eve of Mardi gras*. This woman, an octoroon somewhat notorious among her kind, had, it appears, taken lodgers into her house, a man and a woman, and these also disappeared *on Mardi gras eve*. Six weeks of patient ferreting have developed these facts: The man was blonde, bewhiskered, well-dressed and carried himself like a gentleman. The woman was scarcely seen outside of the cottage,

and never except when veiled; she was graceful and appeared languid, like an invalid, when she walked, two or three times, in the little rear-garden, or passed out to her carriage; they drove almost daily; she was always veiled, he openly unconcerned. Perhaps you will recall the fact that this tallies exactly with Jones' description of the 'missing,' and her escort—the one which called me from Omaha.

"Madame Dauphine, that is what the owner of the cottage calls herself, *sent away her only servant the day before* these strangers arrived, which was more than two weeks before the carnival. Now note this: On the evening after they came—I have dates for these facts—a good looking, blonde, bewhiskered man bought, on Common Street at No.—, *a hypodermic syringe.*

"Mark again: On *Mardi gras* day, not two hours after the discovering of the body at the Victor, a boy found, near the foot of Canal street, a leather case *containing a hypodermic syringe* which he concealed, and thought no more of, except as an object of barter—when the festivities should be over. He did not even know the name or use of the instrument until he tried to dispose of it; but it was identified as the one sold to the blonde, bewhiskered man, by the parties on Common Street. Later, on the same day, a key was found on the Levee; it was the key to *room 99, of the Hotel Victor.*

"I thought it would be well to look up the driver of the carriage which waited every day at the door of Madame Dauphine's cottage, and with this result: B— & B—, who keep a sale stable, sold, *on the very day that the hypodermic instrument was bought*, a pair of bay horses and a carriage to a man who represented himself as wishing to set up a hack upon his own private account; the description of the outfit tallies with that of the turn-out used by Madame Dauphine's tenants. *This carriage, and the horses,*

were found after the carnival's close, *wandering out on the lowlands without a driver*. Up to date this driver is still missing, and Madame Dauphine's house stands *locked and tenantless*—her whereabouts also unknown.

"There, you have the business up to date, and now comes the tug of war—to find the hackman, Madam Dauphine and the blonde bewhiskered man.

"On the whole I think I *won't* turn highwayman—not yet. Yours on the trail, DICK."

This letter found Carnes locked in a calm which was almost beyond endurance, but three weeks later he too had something to say, and he wrote in his characteristic way to Stanhope:

"MY DEAR BOY: If you love me, set a guard upon the empty shell of Madame Dauphine, *and come to my aid*. With my usual luck I find myself suddenly unable to hold my hand; with all my boasted wisdom and *finesse* I can't contrive to be in two places at once, or to keep *one* eye upon opposite points of the compass. Larsen is improving so rapidly that I am momentarily expecting a call from the superintendent, and it's none too soon. If that fellow 'Jinkins' don't swing, it will be because of some grand and lofty feats on our part. His trial *must* come off at the next term or a new cause for delay must be furnished. You will *have* to come if they call the trial, and you may as well come *now* when I so need your help. You can be back in New Orleans in a week or two if my plan succeeds. I have found out at last who the fellow is, and I will know before you can arrive where to find his only remaining relative, who is monstrously rich, it is said. Wire me if you can come. I reserve all explanations until I see you.

"Yours in a tight box, CARNES."



Within the week which followed the receipt of this letter, Rufus Carnes closed the door of his room one day and walked down the corridor toward the stairway, wearing the look of an active, impulsive man, who finds his energies palsied and his ambitions baffled. As he was turning a sharp angle, a second man, coming toward him and looking even a shade more anxious than himself, stopped suddenly and uttered a quick ejaculation, breathing forth at almost the same breath a relieved sigh.

"Carnes—old man!"

"Why, Dick!"

With a quick hand-clasp followed by complete silence, they walked back to the door which Carnes had so lately closed, and which he now opened with reviving eagerness. When they were within the room each scanned the other's face, then—

"What has happened, Dick?" exclaimed one, and—

"Anything gone wrong, Carnes?" asked the other, both in the same breath.

Then Stanhope sat down, looked at his friend and heaved a long sigh.

"I wish I were a woman," he said; "I'd have hysterics in rainbow tints. Pheuw!"

"Why, what's up, Dick?" Carnes had already half-forgotten his own anxiety, in solicitude for his friend.

"Sit down," said Stanhope. "I'll tell you in a minute. I'm fagged."

He looked it; he was pale, almost haggard; his eyes, usually so calmly searching, were full of trouble and anxiety; he was travel-stained and languid, as if almost overcome by fatigue or severe mental strain.

Carnes sat down opposite him, gravely scanning his face.

"Take your time, Dick," he said; "you *do* look done up. Have some wine?"

"No," said Stanhope with a quick negative gesture. "Not now; let's get the talk over at once—I'm too full to keep it back any longer. *Phuew!* I've not slept since I left New Orleans, and not more than half eaten; look at me—and then to cap the climax I must meet with an adventure almost at your door. Carnes—how is John Warham?"

"A week ago," said Carnes, not without some surprise, "he was very low indeed."

Stanhope drew out his handkerchief and passed it across his brow.

"Poor man!" he sighed. "Poor old man!"

"Dick!" cried Carnes, "for heaven's sake *what* ails you?"

"You remember young Baring?" queried Stanhope, settling himself to tell his story, and then as Carnes nodded, "I told you about him and his microscopical society, didn't I?"

Carnes nodded again.

"And I told you about his twenty-nine varieties of blonde hair?"

Carnes nodded and grinned.

"Well, when I went back, you may remember that Baring was gone; he had been called home on account of the illness of his father, and he went, at a moment's notice of course, while Garland was out of town. Well, Baring came back last week, and the first thing he did was to ask for an interview with Garland; we happened to be sitting together when he came. Well, when they came back they both looked serious, and Garland took upon himself the task of telling me that he feared there had been a great mistake. Talk about being haunted! by Jove! a *ghost* would be welcome in exchange for *my* present prospect. Old man, *we have not done with Bertha Warham yet!*"

"We haven't done with her *murderer*."

"Her murderer—bah! we don't even know if she has *been* murdered. There! don't open your mouth; let me get it over! It seems that Baring, in the pursuit of knowledge, put his blonde hairs from the head of that dead girl, under his confounded microscope, and subjected them to other tests; if you want scientific particulars I recommend you to Baring, or Garland; the naked *result* was too much for *me*! Carnes, Bertha Warham, according to all her friends and relatives, was *a natural blonde*, a dark-eyed *fair-haired* girl. *This* hair, which without a doubt came from the head of the murdered girl, *had been dyed!*"

"What!"

"It was *black hair* artificially made yellow."

He waited for his effect—but Carnes sat staring mutely.

"It naturally follows," went on Stanhope, "that I've got to do this thing over again. If that dead woman was not Bertha Warham—"

"Dick!" broke in Carnes, "you won't bungle this business *again*, will you? If there's a *shadow* of doubt in your mind, *you* know what must be done."

"I don't doubt. I have every confidence in the verdict of Garland and Baring. Garland verifies the analysis. But, all the same, I'm bound to make assurance doubly sure. Yes," rising and beginning to stride up and down the room, "I've got to go to *Upton Cemetery*."

"And you've got to take two good men with you—men who know their business."

"No; I only need one."

"Nonsense!"

"Not at all; Baring came North with me. He will be here to-morrow morning if I need him. I shall take Baring—but that isn't all."

"All of what?"



"A few moments ago, about two blocks from your door I met that girl, Rose Hildreth."

"Hildreth? Oh yes. The friend of Miss Warham—the girl of the letters."

"The same; she has not improved since I saw her last; there is nothing about her *now* to distinguish her from the worst of her sort; she stopped me—"

"Umph! of course."

"She stopped me to tell me where to look for Bertha Warham."

Carnes was mute again.

"She has just come back from New York, so she says, and she declared that she *saw Bertha Warham* in that city—*last week*."

"Whew!"

"She says that she followed her, and saw her alight from a carriage at the door of a mansion where she rang and was admitted, and the carriage drove away. The girl is persistent in her belief that it *was* Bertha Warham; she says that she met her face to face, that Bertha came out of a store, passed her, and got into the carriage; she, Rose, followed her in a cab. Rose declares that she recognized her at a glance, *although her hair had turned black*."

"Oh!"

"So you see I have more than *one* thing to do. First Upton, then the Metropolis."

"Turned *black* did you say?"

"That's what I said, and what *Rose* said."

"Did she tell you where this girl, this Bertha Warham with black hair, stopped?"

"Yes, she named the place, and I took it down. It's a swell locality."

"Dick," said Carnes, after a moment's reflection, "you must go *at once* to New York."

"Upton first."

"Wait—you might leave Upton to me, I suppose; the fact is you can kill two birds by going to New York now. It was for this I sent for you."

"*You* wanted me to go to New York?"

"Yes. In the interest of Charlie Jenkins. Couldn't you start to-night?"

"But there's Baring—we were to meet here. Of course I can trust Upton to *you*. But why—?"

"Dick, the time has come to bring our guns upon Larsen; he's almost himself again. *I'll* receive your friend Baring. I'll take him with me to Upton. *Will you go?*"

"Yes. Will you tell me what I am to do for you when I get there?"

"Nothing that will interfere with your own plans. You are simply to call upon Charlie Jenkins' last surviving relative, and state his case; we want help, financial and otherwise."

"And if they won't give it?"

"You must put it strong. The relative is a step-sister, rich and proud. If she refuses her help, tell her, with my compliments, that the man who calls himself 'Jenkins' for the sake of his friends, shall come to trial and be *hanged* under the family name that she is so proud of."

"Well, old man! You're getting warm."

"Warm, anybody would be *warm*. Why, Dick, think of that poor boy—a drunkard, buffeted, friendless, keeping his counsel and letting himself go quietly to destruction, rather than call upon his proud step-sister, who had turned her back upon him, or bring a stain upon the old name that he had given up. There's *that* much blue blood left in *him*. See if she is willing to let such a Jernyngham be hanged as common 'Jenkins.'"

"Jernyngham! Jenkins?"

"Sit down again, Dick. I'll tell you all about it."

## CHAPTER LVI

### A NEW CAMPAIGN

"You see," began Carnes, "this Jenkins, after all, is not a tramp of the common sort. There's good blood in the fellow; and, when the whisky got out of him, it sort of asserted itself. We called it pure obstinacy at first; I suppose Sharp and his men think and call it pure obstinacy, or worse; now, as for me, I've changed my mind. Naturally, Sharp & Co. have concluded that the fellow's past was not to his credit; that there was nothing in it of a redeeming quality; nothing that would turn the heart of the jury-box in his direction. Well, I thought so too; it was the most natural conclusion—taking it all in all."

"I should think so!" ventured Stanhope.

"You should! well, see now what blunders we make when we are led into conclusions by studying the 'physiognomy of things.' We might be floundering in the dark yet if it hadn't been for Circus Fan. That woman is anything but a fool, let me tell you; and she is the only human being that this chap looks upon as a friend. All the rest, the lawyer who has undertaken his defense, the minister, a good zealous soul, that I turned loose upon him, myself, in the guise of a venerable philanthropist, he views with an indifference which would be skeptical if it were not so stolid and despairing. But Fan, after plying all her arts, could get nothing from him except a vague idea, which she based upon some words which he used while he was in the fever. It was hardly



a hint, but she worked from that until she became discouraged. When Fan finally gave up, a bright idea struck me; it was a good while in coming, but when it came I put it into execution; I applied to the parson and told him, under the seal of secrecy of course, as much of the story as was needful to make him understand the situation. The reverend gentleman is a man of tact, and when he set out to visit our obstinate martyr, Fan and I felt quite hopeful.

- “Well, sir, that good man went day after day; he took a genuine interest in the fellow, and I think he won upon him a little, but, after nearly two weeks of daily effort, he came to me and told me that he could do nothing with him; ‘but,’ said he, ‘I have found out this much: some time in his life the poor boy has had a leaning toward the Episcopal church. I think that, if Jinkins were really face to face with his fate, believed himself dying in fact, or doomed, he would confide in an Episcopal clergyman—if he has anything to confide—but it would be a sacred confidence, a last confession of a dying man.’ Then I caught at another idea, and Fan and I went into council again. I called on our lawyer and enlisted him too. It was lucky for our plans that
- Circus Fan is a clever actress, and not oversentimental, and that the lawyer *was* a lawyer. For the week that followed—we thought it best to give him a week of preparation—was full of heartless work. Circus Fan abandoned her cheerful tactics, and let him see plainly that she had given up all hope for him. His trial would come off without doubt at the next term and there was absolutely no defense, not even an alibi; she cried, as if he were already hanging in the jail-yard, called him a poor martyr, and asked him where he would wish to be buried, provided his body could be bought or stolen from the jail officials. All the week she rung the changes

upon these themes; and sometimes, for variation, she pictured the consternation of his murderers when it came out—as it would she predicted, when he was dead and past saving—that they had hanged an innocent man. Leave a woman alone to pile up the agony! Fan did it. She tortured that poor fellow, but she never overdid it. The lawyer of course took a different cue; he was neither sentimental nor sympathetic; either would have been out of his line, but he was grum and crusty, like a man who has been inveigled into defending a hopeless case. He openly declared it hopeless, and told Charlie that he was as good as hanged, and that he might thank himself for it, asked him if he had any farewell requests to make, and suggested that a sketch of his life, confided to the chaplain or to himself, and only to be opened after his death, might put him, or his ghost, in a better light before the public. In short he was as sardonic and diabolical in his method of torture as Fan had been in hers, and by the end of the week our man was in a fit state of mind for the last act.

“I don’t mind admitting to you, Dick, that I was a little puzzled; I didn’t know how to begin. I had decided to play clergyman myself, and I didn’t want to disgrace the cloth; when I came to run over in my mind what I knew about the Episcopal faith, I found that I needed coaching—a great deal of it too. I actually spent that entire week posting myself for my part, with the help of my friend the dominie, the lawyer, whose wife happened to be an Episcopalian; and even Circus Fan, *she* knew more about the ‘Established church’ than I did, by considerable.

“When I was schooled and groomed for my part, I wasn’t such a bad-looking rector—one of the benign, fatherly, approachable sort, you know. But I tell you, Dick Stanhope, I’d rather run down the most dangerous assassin

that ever escaped justice, fight him hand to hand, yes, and let him cut my throat and make his escape, than go through with that interview again. I'm not going to tell you all about it. I *couldn't*. How I ever got through with it I don't know now. I didn't put any profane levity into my part, and I don't believe that a born, bred and ordained minister could have prayed a more honest prayer, for the man's life was at stake, and I felt my responsibility; I had a notion that there was a sort of secret understanding between the Most High and my rascally self, and hoped He'd see that I meant well, if I didn't mean just what I said. At any rate my prayer was answered—in part—and—you should have heard me sing a hymn! No—I don't mean that; I could not have carried it out if I had had even Circus Fan for an audience."

"But you *can* sing a hymn, Carnes. I've heard you. I can imagine the fervor of it." Stanhope's tone was perfectly grave and sincere. He was thinking of the motive for this clerical masquerade, not of its absurdity.

"Well at any rate it was a success. He told me a little; enough for his purpose, and for mine. It wasn't a maudlin, tearful story; he didn't seem to demand or expect sympathy. He has been a prodigal son, he has spent his substance like the original prodigal, and he endures his husks with better philosophy; takes them as a matter of course. He has made me lose all my respect for that old Bible prodigal who carried his empty stomach home to his father when the husks began to lose their flavor. Charlie Jenkins is a prodigal with modern improvements. *He* didn't show the white feather. He just told his story simply, and with praiseworthy reserve. His real name is Carl Jernyngham. His mother, it seems, was a mere girl when she married one of the rich Philadelphia Jernynghams; she was



thrown from her carriage and died of her hurts when he was two years old. Within the year his father married again; the second wife was a rich woman, and she never had much love for her step-son; she had but one child, a daughter, and the daughter inherited her mother's pride and antipathies; the father was immersed in business, and the boy grew up in a luxurious home but literally without a friend; his father made him a generous allowance, sent him to school, and took very little notice of him beyond this; he was an idle boy with an unattractive home and money enough to bring about him all manner of tempters; naturally he went to the dogs. His step-mother died, and his young step-sister became more arrogant than ever, and when he learned that his father was about to bring home a third wife, a haughty young woman of society, he left the home-roof for good. Soon after he came into possession of his mother's fortune, which was small in comparison with his step-sister's, but still considerable. Then his downward course began in earnest. He gambled, drank, and frequented the lowest resorts of pleasure. He was good-tempered, easily influenced, liberal; and his money dwindled rapidly. When he was in a fair way to become a conspicuous disgrace to his family his father made a feeble effort to reclaim him, and failing in this, formally disinherited him. Two years afterward the prodigal learned incidentally, through a newspaper, of his father's death—he wrote to his step-sister then, and she replied, sending him a check for a thousand dollars, and advising him to emigrate and reform. Another year passed, his money was gone, he fell sick and got into no end of trouble, but he weathered through until a little less than a year ago, when being sick and more forlorn than usual he wrote again to his half-sister. After some weeks of waiting she wrote him guardedly, without name or ad-

dress, and only signing her initials; she told him that she was about to be married to a man of aristocratic birth who would discard her at once if he knew that she was burdened with a relative so disreputable; her future happiness was bound up in this splendid *fiance*. For her own sake she must disown him, must refuse to assist him further. If he persisted in writing to her, he would simply spoil her whole life. She would send him once more a little money, but under *no* circumstances must he write her again—under *no circumstances*. She threw herself upon his mercy; he must remember that after her marriage she could not receive a letter from him. She must be dead to him, and he to her. If he persisted in applying to her for aid, it would be useless; in her own defense she must ignore him; he would only wreck her life without benefiting himself. She was writing to him, helping him, *for the last time*."

"Good heavens!" broke in Stanhope. "And that is the woman you wish *me* to interview! Upon my word I don't know what to think of you."

"If you'll hold your tongue," cried Carnes, "until I have told my story out, I'll let *you* talk."

"Go on, then."

"The fellow told me all this quite calmly, not trying to conceal his own faults, and touching very lightly upon the unnatural conduct of this female aristocrat, never uttering one word of censure; and then he asked me to inform her, when all was over, of his death, if I could do so without letting her know how and for what crime he died—simply inform her, in my capacity of chaplain, that he was dead, and that he died harboring no unkind thoughts of her. Think of *that*, will you! No, sir, I don't *want* you to go to her; I *want* to go myself. I want to see her face when she hears the truth. It would be a study in blue-blood worth travel-

ing around the world for. It isn't often that I hanker for female society, but I do want half an hour face to face with that woman, with the privilege of talking to her straight out of my heart. But it can't be; you must go, Dick. She must be made to come forward with her money and her influence—it wouldn't count much without the money."

"And the aristocratic husband?"

"Never mind him. Must a man be hanged to save *his* nerves? Jenkins knows his name and that they have left Philadelphia, and are living in New York."

"Well, you had better give me the name, and I'll telegraph ahead and have them looked up; if they are swell people they won't be hard to *find*, but time is valuable."

"That's so. Jenkins saw the notice of their removal to New York in the society column of an old newspaper. I guess you'll find them swell enough. You will want to see the woman first, won't you?"

"I suppose so." Stanhope rubbed his chin thoughtfully and for a moment they were both silent, then Carnes said abruptly:

"Do you believe that girl Hildreth's story, about following this supposed Bertha Warham in a cab?"

"Well, I don't feel especially skeptical about the *cab*. From what I saw of the little Hildreth I don't think she would care to have a personal encounter with her old-time friend, supposing her to be living, and that they did really meet. But she is full of curiosity, and that kind of boldness that would not hesitate to jump into a cab and play the spy. And she would take a sort of pleasure in finding out a thing that would place the woman who had cut her acquaintance in an unpleasant position. She thinks that the girl has gotten into snug quarters, under some incognito, and that if we find her it will spoil her plans. Don't you see?"



"What do you think about it?"

"Think! I decline to think! What could I think? But this I tell you: if I have *any* reason for thinking that Bertha Warham is alive and in New York, I'm going to have someone who knew her well, brought face to face with her. - I've done with identification by photograph."

"There is one person," said Carnes slowly, "who would not fail to know her, I think, under any mask."

"Who?"

"Larsen."

## CHAPTER LVII

MRS. E. PERCY JERMYN

It was a rare spring day, when Stanhope, armed with the address of Mrs. E. Percy Jermyn, set out upon a tour of inspection.

It was on just such a day as fair ladies choose for the display of early spring toilets, upon the fashionable up-town streets, and in Central Park; and gorgeous equipages were already thick upon the street down which the young detective paced, for he had already reached that magical precinct, "Up Town."

As he was nearing a row of stately houses, built upon the side of the street which lay in the fullest glare of the spring sunshine, he slackened his pace a little, and referred to the small memorandum-book which he took from a convenient pocket, and in which the address of Mrs. E. Percy Jermyn had been penciled only that morning.

"It's on the other side," he muttered, restoring the memorandum book to his pocket. "I thought it was there," and he crossed the street, and walked through the sunshine toward the stately row.

A carriage was standing at the curb-stone before the last house in the row, and Stanhope, having reached the first one, looked up at the door and said to himself:

"It's that last house," and then as he came nearer, "if *that's* my lady's carriage she rides in state, and keeps good horses."

He was quite as willing to be seen, as he was anxious

to see, and so there were no traces of the good-looking, well-dressed young man that he naturally was; he was carelessly and somewhat shabbily clad and he carried under his arm a package, which though not large enough, nor heavy enough, to be burdensome, or too obtrusive, was still sufficiently conspicuous, together with his air and general appearance, to mark him at once as a conscientious, and not too positive "runner of errands"—one of those amiable and imperturbable creatures who, under no pressure of circumstances, are ever beguiled into running, while traversing the streets in their professional capacity.

Thus equipped he could loiter and scan the number of the houses without exciting comment or notice—and he was very much at his leisure when he sauntered past the stately row, stopping on the way to stare at a passing carriage, to drop his bundle and pick it up again, and to peer up at the numbers over the doors, shading his eyes with his hand, and seeming to make out the figures with difficulty.

He had made so slow a progress that he was yet two doors away from the house before which the carriage stood, when the heavy portal swung open, and a lady came out and down the steps, crossing the pavement toward the carriage.

Stanhope quickened his speed, boldly intent upon catching a glimpse of the lady's face; and he succeeded fully, for as he came opposite the carriage wherein she was already seated, she turned her face toward him and bent forward to speak to her coachman.

Then suddenly Stanhope's hand took a tighter grip upon the package which he carried; his shoulders became erect, his look alert and full of startled eagerness.

That face was *the face of Bertha Warham!*

For a moment, he stood staring after the now mov-



ing carriage, then his look changed, his shoulders drooped again, he was the runner of errands once more; like a flash a thought had crossed his mind bringing with it relief.

He had not thought of it, in writing down the address of Mrs. E. Percy Jermyn, or he had only thought it a coincidence, that the house to which Rose Hildreth had traced Bertha Warham, and the house of "Charlie Jinkins'" half-sister should be upon the same street; but as he moved on he drew from his pocket the memorandum-book and turning back a page found the number given him by Rose Hildreth. Yes, they *were* the same; Bertha Warham and Mrs. E. Percy Jermyn were under one roof! He need not follow that receding carriage. He could go home, think over this strange complication and prepare for action.

Within the hour his decision was made: If Bertha Warham was under Mrs. Jermyn's roof surely Fate was beginning to play into his hands. He had a pretext and a good one for going once, twice, oftener perhaps to this house, and it would be strange if he could not contrive to see this girl again, to convince himself that she was or was not Bertha Warham!

When he again set out, Richard Stanhope was a pleasing figure. His lithe form was set off by garments that were perfect in fit and fashion. He had made no effort to disguise himself, only to look his best, and that he did. Richard Stanhope in *propria persona*, attired for a morning call upon a lady, was a figure to grace a drawing-room. Handsome, erect, a man to win friends and inspire confidence. He did not look like one bent upon a grave errand; his fine mouth wore a half-smile beneath his short, thick, dark, mustache; his clear, handsome brown eyes looked out upon the world with that fearless frank, good-humored, indifferent gaze, that

never fails of its impression, especially upon a woman who admired strength and beauty in a man.

Perhaps Rufus Carnes, older and bearing upon his face more of time's battle-scars, was wiser than he seemed in sending, as ambassador to a proud woman, this good-looking, clear-headed, self-controlled young fellow, with his iron will and his tact and cleverness.

Even the splendid footman, who opened the door to him, failing to impress the caller with a sense of his liveried magnificence, was himself impressed, and bore away, together with the card upon his salver, a conviction that he had done himself honor in receiving with his best deportment the message of an American aristocrat.

Stanhope had chosen for his call the hour at which most male New Yorkers are "down town." He trusted that Mr. Jermyn would not disappoint his expectations by being at home, and sent up his card boldly, with a few words penciled underneath his name, to Mrs. Jermyn.

In a few moments the servant returned; Mrs. Jermyn would receive her caller in the drawing-room; would the gentleman follow him?

The gentleman was very willing, and was ushered out of the little reception room, across a broad hall, and into a drawing room, all crimson and white and gold.

He swept the room with one swift glance, but it was empty, and without a word the tall footman bowed and retired.

Five minutes passed while Stanhope stood gazing about the beautiful room with careless, half-interested eyes, then a heavy curtain, at the end of the room directly opposite him, was swept aside, and he saw, first a white, jeweled hand, and then a graceful figure, with head half-averted, gliding under the arch.

Mrs. Jermyn of course; he started toward her, and then as she came out into the clear light from the great

double windows, he stopped, and for one instant almost betrayed the surprise he felt.

Again it was that face—the face of Bertha Warham.

She came forward quickly and with a look of interested expectation.

"You will pardon my delay, I hope," she began in a sweet, clear, well-modulated voice, and he saw at the moment that she held his card in her hand. "I was obliged to keep you waiting—I have just come in from a drive."

He bowed, and she favored him with one sweeping glance from her clear dark eyes. Then she came a step nearer, looking him straight in the face.

"Your card, Mr. Stanhope, was very welcome to me—it says you have brought a message from—from my brother."

A thousand strange thoughts flitted through Stanhope's brain as he stood face to face with the woman who looked so strangely, so marvelously like Bertha Warham. After all, was it only a wonderful resemblance? was Bertha Warham dead? and was this really Mrs. E. Percy Jermyn?

But there was no trace of his mental uncertainty in his face as he bowed and asked:

"Are you then Mrs. Jermyn?"

"Surely," she glanced down at the card and then up at his face, and there was a little accent of surprise in her voice. "I am trying to remember if I have met you before, Mr. Stanhope—the name somehow has a familiar sound."

"If we had met before I should not have forgotten it, madame. My name is not an uncommon one."

"It is not common," she said, and then moved toward a seat. Her manner was calm and dignified, yet very pleasing; as he crossed the floor a sudden thought struck



him: Bertha Warham had blonde hair, they said, and this woman's hair was *black*! Then he remembered that he had never *seen* the blonde hair; he had seen only the photograph, and that, a monochrome with its lights and shades that had only heightened the resemblance, had misled him; if he could see the golden hair beside the black, would that resemblance be so great? He wanted to take the photograph from his pocket and compare it with the face before him, and then he thought of Baring's strange discovery of the black hair that had been turned to golden—of the body buried in the Upton cemetery with "Bertha Warham, aged twenty years," upon the coffin plate, of Carnes and his ghastly mission. What did it all mean? How would it all end?

Mrs. Jermyn was speaking.

"Will you sit here, sir?" she indicated by a gesture an easy-chair near her own.

"If you have seen my brother I shall want to detain you—to ask a great many questions. His message—"

Stanhope bowed and took the seat she had pointed out, moving it a very little to give him a better view of her face.

"It is not a message that I have for you," he said gravely. "It is news—information."

"Not *bad* news, Mr. Stanhope?" she spoke quickly, and there was an anxious ring in her low voice.

"It is not good, Mrs. Jermyn. Your brother is in serious trouble."

Having made this announcement he paused, and for a moment the two regarded each other silently.

Her face was full of apprehension, as was but natural; her eyes looked straight into his own, while he—he looked the respectful and regretful bearer of ill news, and nothing more.

"She takes it naturally!" he thought; "she's a sincere

woman, or a very clever actress —I wish I knew which!"

And she—of what was she thinking?

"Mr. Stanhope," she leaned toward him and half-extended her hand, "what is it?—tell me—tell me the worst at once." Her voice was slightly tremulous; she kept her eyes fixed upon his face.

"Your brother is in prison, Mrs. Jermyn. There is a serious charge against him. He needs powerful friends or his life may be sacrificed."

Her hands came together in her lap, and clasped and unclasped themselves there.

"Explain," she whispered; "where is he? what is this charge? Tell me all about it as quickly as possible; we may be interrupted!" She had grown very pale; she still leaned toward him, and, throughout the recital, kept her glowing eyes fixed upon his face.

"I am going to begin by telling you *how* I became interested in your brother," began Stanhope. "I am a person of more or less leisure, and of an inquiring turn of mind. Some time ago I formed the acquaintance of a detective several years older than myself, and we became firm friends. It is through him that I became acquainted with your brother's condition, and at his request, that I came to you. I have with me the accounts of the story given by the newspapers; you can read them at your leisure. What I am about to tell you is not known except to my friend the detective, your brother, and myself;" and he told the story of Charlie Jenkins. He did not tell the story as Carnes had told it to him, but more graphically and with more pathos. He began at the beginning, or at the point where "Charlie Jenkins" first appeared to Circus Fan, and uniting the fragments that Carnes had gathered together, he wove them into a simpler, more connected story. He described the scene in the cell when Jenkins made his dying confession and request,

to the supposed clergyman, graphically, like one who has seen what he relates, and his delicacy in handling that part of Jenkins' story which touched upon his letters to his step-sister, and her repulse, was a master-stroke. It spared her pride, her *amour propre*. And throughout the recital he did not speak the name of the woman for whose murder an innocent man might be called upon to suffer, nor name either Rufus Carnes or "Charlie Jenkins."

When he paused, she withdrew her eyes from his face, unlocked her white hands, that in spite of their littleness looked so strong and full of character, and rising from her chair, began to pace the length of the room.

"I don't know what to do!" she said as she turned away. "I don't know what to *think*!"

As she moved away from him he had time to note the splendid poise of her head, splendid even in that moment of agitation; the lithe grace of her form and gait and the rich simplicity of her gown of olive, which harmonized so perfectly with the crimson and gold of her surroundings. Then as she turned and came toward him, he arose.

"I do not expect you to act solely upon my suggestion, Mrs. Jermyrn," he said. "I ask you to telegraph to this detective, to the chief of police, to the lawyer who is defending this poor fellow. Convince yourself, then act. I have other business in the city; I shall remain here some days. If I can serve you I am at your disposal—"

A quick look of relief came over her face; she paused directly before him.

"How much time is there?" she asked quickly.

"Before his trial? It has been staved off on one pretext and another, again and again. If we may hope for assistance from you I think the trial might be put off another month, perhaps two."

"If!" she drew herself up to her fullest height, her



eyes flashed into his. "You say *if*; do you think I will *refuse* my aid?—that I will let that poor boy die? Oh, I am not so heartless as you must think me! He shall be *saved* if money and skill can save him!" She started and turned her face toward the door as if listening, then resumed speaking hurriedly:

"You have proffered your assistance and I shall need it I fear. I must think of this and find a way. May I see you to-morrow—not here—I will explain my reasons—we must not discuss this matter here; can you give me an hour to-morrow morning?"

"Yes."

"Then—will you be in Central Park in the morning, say at eleven o'clock? I often walk there. I will leave my carriage near the Art Museum; it is not a show day and we can talk safely there—I mean without interruption." And then bending toward him with that look of appeal that is doubly charming coming from a proud woman, she said:

"You will not misunderstand me, sir? you will not think me indifferent to the fate of this poor boy if I ask you to excuse me for to-day—to consider this meeting at an end? You—*he* shall have my help; I promise it! But I must act alone, or only with your aid."

Again her eyes were fixed upon his face, and he met them with a frank smile.

"I understand," he said; "I will not fail you, Mrs. Jermyn."

"Thank you," she said fervently. "I was sure you would not; and I will not fail *you*."

He drew from his pocket a little packet composed of slips cut from many newspapers, and neatly held together with a rubber band.

"This," he said, "is the story as it was told by the newspapers; it is harsh and uncharitable, but when you

have read it you will know all that is known by anyone, except the actual murderer, of this strange affair; until to-morrow then, Mrs. Jermyrn."

"What a splendid face," she murmured when she was left alone in the drawing-room; "frank and manly and strong; I never *saw* a finer specimen of manhood."

And then, with a grave countenance, compressed lips and darkly glowing eyes, she went straight to her boudoir, a marvel of glowing rose hue and creamy laces, and locked herself in. Then she crossed the room, and standing before a tall Queen Anne mirror, surveyed herself critically, the gravity of her face deepening. Next, and with a long shuddering sigh she opened a drawer in an *escretoire* that stood in a niche built into the corner of the room, and taking from it a box of ebony and gilt, sat down beside a small table, placed the box upon it and opened it with a tiny key which she carried about her person; from this box she took, one after another, four or five small volumes, all bound with leather and closed with a clasp of gold; each clasp bearing the monogram "E. J."

From these volumes she selected one, after opening and glancing at several, and opened it at the fly-leaf which bore the inscription.

"Ellen Jernyngham's journal for 18—."

Meanwhile Stanhope, sorely puzzled, had returned to his hotel where he found a telegram awaiting him.

He opened it with eager haste and read these words.

"Investigation made. Baring's testimony corroborated. Baring will be in N. Y. within the week. Look for him at the 'Avenue Hotel'.

CARNES."

"Baring coming here!" muttered Stanhope. "What's bringing *him* here, I should like to know?"

## CHAPTER LVIII

### A\* STRANGE PROPOSAL

They were so punctual at the appointed time and place, the next morning, that Stanhope, turning into one of the broad walks that approached the New art building, saw Mrs. Jermyn alight from her carriage, a short distance away. She saw him, and nodding slightly, came promptly toward him, with that easy grace which he had noted and admired in her at their previous interviews.

She did not glance about her, like one who fears observation. She did not even order her coachman to drive on; but she put out her hand, when they met within full sight of the carriage, and gave him a fleeting half-smile, by way of greeting.

She was daintily clad, and her fine face, though a little pale, was serene and inscrutable. If she had passed the long hours of the night in thinking and planning, it must have been to some purpose; there was no trace of the hesitancy which had been manifest in her speech at their first meeting. She knew what she had come to say, and she said it, frankly, charmingly.

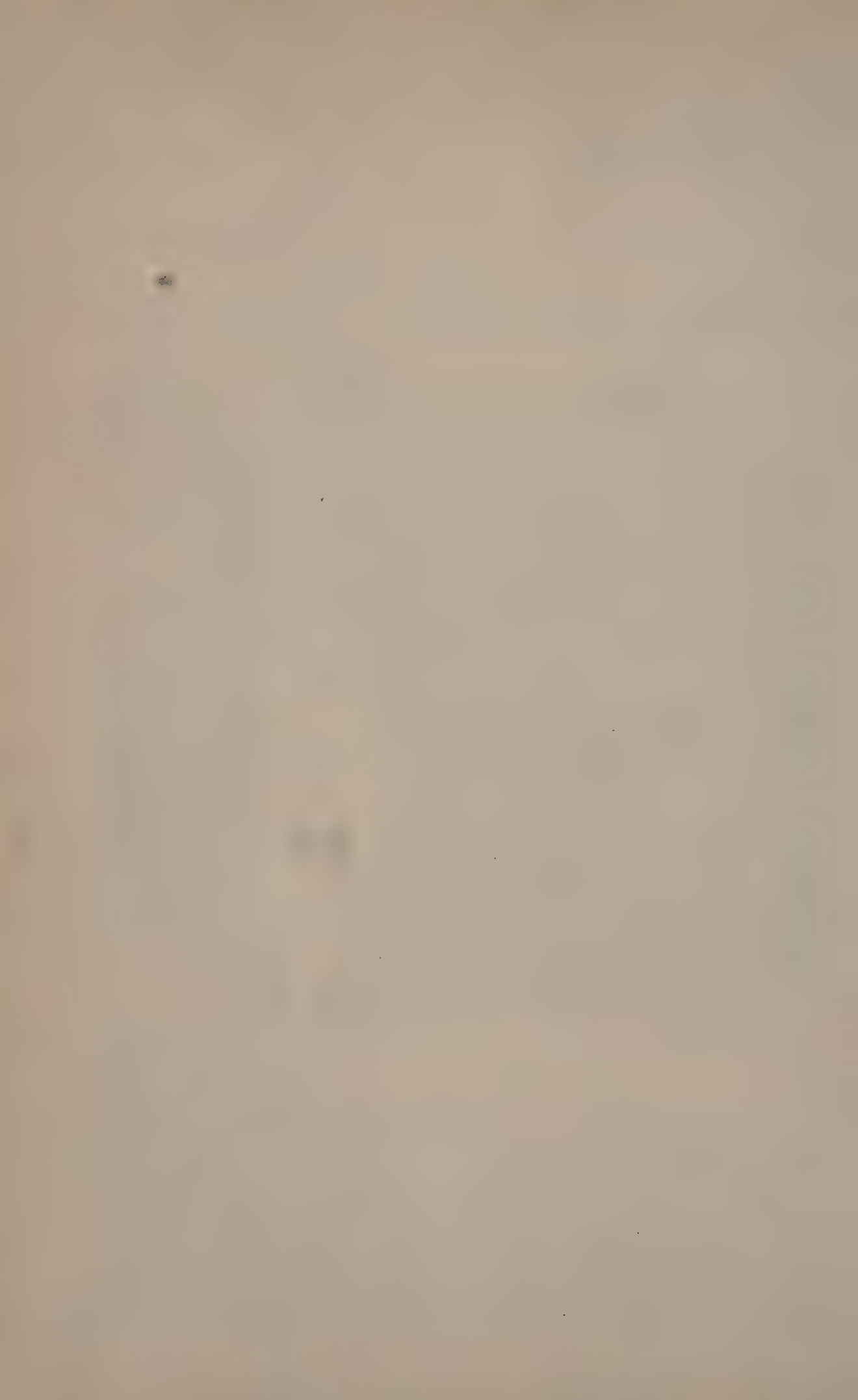
"I am glad you are so prompt," were her first words. "I have so much to say; and time seems so very precious just now; let us sit upon one of those seats yonder, Mr. Stanhope; but first I will tell my coachman to drive about."

She turned and made a sign to the coachman, who understood it and, tightening the reins in his hands,





WHEN THEY WERE SEATED, SHE TURNED UPON HIM THAT STRAIGHT-  
FORWARD GAZE.—Slender Clue, p. 523.



drove slowly away, while Stanhope turned and walked beside her toward the place she had indicated, silent wondering, admiring. When they were seated she turned upon him that straightforward gaze which seemed to fear nothing, and to have nothing to conceal; and crossing her hands in her lap, said:

"Since I saw you yesterday, Mr. Stanhope, I have done little but think of my poor brother; I am not sure that I slept at all last night. There was so much to face. I am so peculiarly placed. But do me the justice to believe that it is not for my own sake that I have asked you to come out here to meet me. It is because I intend to save Carl Jernyngham if it can be done, and because I find myself compelled to ask for your assistance, my only justification being your interest in the poor boy, already manifest."

Her eyes were searching his face, and she saw in it attentive interest, a little surprise, possibly a shade of admiration; and this was all that was visible; nevertheless, behind this exterior was the sharp eye and the acute brain of the clever detective, who, master of himself and the situation, sees, weighs, judges, aided by an instinct that is almost genius.

Stanhope had been thinking too, and he was now armed against surprise, at all points, he thought.

"You have said that my brother told your friend, in his clerical character, that I broke off our intercourse, and why," she resumed. "And if the reason existed then, do you not see that it exists, and is even stronger *now*? I could not let the truth concerning my brother's misdeeds come to the knowledge of Mr. Jermyn then. He *must not* know it now. If the choice lay between us, if either Carl or I must be sacrificed, I think—I hope, I would have the courage to brave the worst. I am sure that I should. "But it would not be I



alone who would suffer; it would not be our name—the name of Jernyngham—only, that would be dragged in the dust; it would be his name, of which he is so proud. I cannot bear that; I dare not let him hear of this disgrace, and I must help Carl. I must go to him."

"Go to him!"

"Yes. There is no better way, no way so good. I have thought it all out, and it can be done—if you will help me."

She was speaking calmly, but her face was very earnest. Her hands, resting upon her lap, gripped each other firmly.

"Tell me your plan, madam," he said respectfully.

"First, this trial must be again put off a month—two if possible."

"That can be managed, perhaps."

"Next—before I go further—will you answer a few personal questions, Mr. Stanhope? you will see my motive soon."

"Ask them."

"I want to know if you have a fixed home, parents, sisters and brothers."

"I have no fixed home, and if I have a relative in all this world I do not know it."

A new look—a mixture of relief and eagerness crossed her face; he could almost fancy that his answer pleased her.

"If, being here, just as you are, you should find it necessary, or expedient, to play a part, to assume a character other than your own, and to keep up this assumption for days, perhaps weeks, could you, *would* you do it, provided it was not an unpleasant role which you were asked to play, that it would occasion you no expense, and no trouble beyond the loss of your time, and would result in good to another?"

"I don't think I would find much difficulty, if the character were not hard to assume, and if it seemed necessary—and right."

"Now, let me cite you a case: suppose that, instead of being the man he is, and lying a prisoner in Chicago, my half-brother were a young man, like yourself for instance. Understand, my husband knows that I have a half-brother, who is a rover, a wanderer in unknown lands, but he does *not* know what his past career has been. As I say, suppose that this half-brother, not as he *is*, but such as I could wish him to be, should come to my door to-day; do you not see that I could welcome him gladly, present him to my husband, and force him to accept the part of my fortune that should have been his—if I chose?"

"Yes," assented Stanhope, unable to guess at her meaning. "I can see how easy that might be."

"Suppose," she went on, "that my brother came home like this. Suppose he came to-morrow, and that next week I, with the full and cordial consent of Mr. Jermyn, put into his hands a large sum of money. Suppose that then he should fancy paying a visit to Chicago—I have friends, old and dear friends near that city—would it not be natural that I should accompany him? and could we not be in Chicago before this poor fellow, who calls himself Charlie Jenkins, comes to trial?"

She was leaning toward him, her cheeks aglow with suppressed excitement, her eyes searching his face.

"I don't understand you," he said.

"Don't you see how easy it would be?" she went on eagerly. "Don't you see that it would spare me? it might save him; it could not harm *you*!"

"Do you mean—" he began, then broke off suddenly.

"Ah, you *do* understand! I was sure you would! oh, pardon me! it is the only way. And Carl *must* be saved!

You will help me, will you not? you will play the part? You can do it, I am sure!"

"Let me be sure that I understand you, madam. What is it that you wish me to do?"

She arose and stood before him, her eyes aglow, a scarlet flame in either cheek; she was no longer able to keep down the excitement that swayed her.

"I want you to assume the name of Carl Jernyngham," she said. "I want you to come to my house and make your home there. I want you to receive this money and use it to save Carl. I want you to take me to him. It will not be difficult. Edward Percy Jermyn will not *dare* lift voice against *you!*"

For a long moment he held her eye with his own. Then— "Will you answer one question?" he asked, "and answer it frankly."

She was silent a moment, then—

"Yes," she answered.

"Do you believe that this is the best way to save your brother?"

"I *do*," she said quickly.

"And without this do you fear hinderance?"

Again she was silent and seemed trying to read his very soul.

"Can I trust you *fully*?" she asked suddenly.

"You can."

"Then," she said, "I will tell you the truth: I fear hinderance for Carl's sake, and *I fear worse for myself.*"



## CHAPTER LIX

### EUREKA

At half-past one Mr. and Mrs. Jermyn are seated in their sunny morning-room, at their *tete-a-tete* luncheon; Mr. Jermyn looking not a day older than, on that spring day a year ago, when he arrived in Roseville, to dazzle its inhabitants, to conquer and be conquered.

In fact he is looking at this moment more like the distinguished son of a British peer who brought confusion to Rene Brian, and set—with the efficient aid of Mrs. Brace—all the feminine hearts of Roseville in a flutter, than he has looked for more than a year; for the flowing blonde beard, promptly cultivated and steadily worn until very recently, has been sacrificed to the barber's knife, and the smooth, clear-cut, high-bred blonde face has grown youthful by this change.

If one may judge by his placidity, his slow easy movements, and the half-smile hovering about his lips as he glances across at his *vis-a-vis*. Mr. Jermyn finds the world a pleasant place, and life well worth living; there is not a line, not a scar, not a shadow to indicate that weariness, anxiety, disappointment or baffled effort have ever touched hands with him.

In all that great city, perhaps, there is not another man whose life, day by day, is so placidly calm, so open to scrutiny, so entirely blameless. Breakfasting at nine, reading and writing in his study or experimenting

in his laboratory until noon; lunching at home; always at the disposal of Mrs. Jermyn to drive, to walk, to receive callers in the drawing-room, to act as escort at her every call, or if left to his own devices driving his favorite horse, always a very good one, in the parks or on the Harlem road; dropping in for half an hour at a very select club and then back to his laboratory, his books or his drawing-room; not a man of society, yet a charming host; not ostentatious, but always charitable. There is nothing in Mr. Jermyn's daily life that will not bear the closest scrutiny and shine the clearer for the investigation.

"That gown," says Mr. Jermyn, letting his eye rest approvingly upon the lady opposite him who is idly trifling with the viands before her and eating little, "that gown is charming; you are always happy in your selections; it's a genius that you possess, I think."

"It's a sublime disregard for expense rather," replies the lady carelessly. "I don't think you realize how much elegant simplicity costs."

"I don't care how much it costs," he says, helping himself to a dainty morsel, "so long as it's charming. I don't care for *money* for its own sake, you know. If your gowns were ill-chosen and did not fit, I might wish the money were put to better use."

"I certainly should," she says, with light emphasis.

"Well, since your garments seem to have grown expressly for you, I rejoice in them. Am I to infer from that toilet it is a new one, is it not? I certainly have not seen it before. Am I to infer that it is donned for the afternoon? do you not go out to-day?"

"I think not—I hardly know, as yet. As for the gown, it was put on for your inspection."

"I appreciate that. Thank you. How should you like to drive with me in my new cart?"

"Immediately?"

"No. In two hours, perhaps."

"I think it might be pleasant—the day is fine. Have you finished? Shall I ring?"

He nods, and when she has arisen, pushes back his chair, walks beside her to the door, opens it, and smiles upon her as she passes him, going her way to the drawing-room, while he goes to his study to smoke his mid-day cigar.

The cigar is not yet half consumed when the study door opens, and his wife enters, closing it behind her, coming straight toward him, an open letter in her hand.

It is not her habit to visit him thus, and he sees in her face that something has occurred to startle her. Her lips are compressed, and there is a little line between her dark brows.

He tosses away his cigar as she advances, and rises with a graceful gesture of welcome.

But she does not heed the gesture nor its accompanying smile; she only holds out the letter, and stands, looking at him steadfastly while he reads.

Presently he has finished it, and turned his face toward her, and their eyes meet—his placid as usual, but questioning hers as if he were saying in words:

"Well this is the test!" As if he had spoken, she answers:

"I am going down to the drawing room. Will you come?"

Her voice is cool and steady, but the little line is still between her brows.



"I did not think it would happen," he says slowly, "I am sorry, my child, for your sake."

She laughs, lightly, scornfully. "Our regret is mutual," she says; "of course there is but one thing to do! We are Vere de Veres."

"True, and that one thing that you mention, we will do gracefully. Let us see," taking up the letter again. "Oh!" reading, "'I am once more in New York, after years of roving; this is only my herald; I shall follow it within the hour. Carl Jernyngham.' It's a well-sounding name, is it not?"

"Very! almost as fine as E. Percy Jermyn. Shall we go down?"

"My dear, you are adorable! We will go down, by all means. Take my arm, Mrs. Jermyn."

He proffers his arm with courtly gravity, and she takes it with a bow and a little mocking smile, and so together they go to the drawing-room.

They do not look like an anxious pair as they sit there, he idly turning the leaves of an illustrated *volume de Luxe*, she seated at the piano and carelessly running her fingers across the keys, evoking thus little ripples of melody which fall upon the ears of the young man who for a time has taken upon himself the personality of Carl Jernyngham as he crosses the threshold.

"Mr. Jernyngham," says the footman appearing in the doorway, and then falling back, wondering a little, for even well-trained footmen in livery have more or less of human curiosity in their composition, and this particular footman has recognized the visitor, and is vaguely conscious that his name has undergone a change, and definitely conscious of the change in his bearing.

Stanhope has chosen for himself a character, to which Mrs. Jermyn has added only the name, and he has come prepared to play his part with zest, and to convince her that he *has* some dramatic talent.

If we could see upon the stage such acting as passes unnoticed every day of our lives before an audience of one or two, in drawing-rooms and kitchens, on the streets, and in secret places, we might then believe that we possessed among us dramatic and tragic art and artists. But alas! our players of fleeting fame have not the motive that actuates these players whose dramas are drawn out the length of a life-time.

If critical Mr. Jermyn could know that the little scene to which he is a witness is merely a studied act, without a rehearsal, he would applaud it to the echo; it is drama and comedy met.

But, while he may have reason for doubting the sincerity of his wife's greeting, he does not know the merits of the good-looking young comedian, who, smiling brightly, and stepping briskly, like a man sure of himself and of his welcome, enters the drawing-room. He appreciates the scene, however; the white hands of Mrs. Jermyn slip from the piano keys, she utters a little exclamation, starts, stops, and then comes quickly forward with both hands outstretched, and as the confident young man clasps them promptly in both his own, she says earnestly, "Carl! is this really Carl Jernyngham?"

"It's nobody else," he says with the air of one a little surprised or hurt by this lack of recognition. "You don't mean I have changed so much that you don't know me, Ellen?"

"It has been so long, Carl."

"Well, yes." letting go her hands suddenly; "but that wasn't *my* fault, altogether. I hope you don't think I have changed for the worse?"

"No, you are improved—much improved," turning about with a stately gesture, "Carl, this is my husband, Mr. Jermyn."

"Oh!" The two men advance and meet near the center of the room, and Mr. Jermyn is not able to decide, when the greeting is over, whether he has been welcoming a long-lost brother-in-law, or receiving the good-natured patronage of this same self-possessed individual.

But he is a man of tact; he accepts the situation and the brother-in-law—temporarily; steps into the breach, and carries the conversation into safe and easy channels.

He is not over-curious, and he does not court curiosity. He listens with grave interest while the newly arrived gives a vivacious, veracious, and highly interesting account of his "travels and adventures;" and he tells, in his turn, how anxious Mrs. Jermyn has been to get some news of him, how anxious they *both* have been, in fact.

"Ellen's health seemed failing her, a few months ago," he says, glancing across at Mrs. Jermyn, who sits looking from one to the other and leaving the conversation to them. "I began to feel alarmed at her condition; she seemed to take gloomy views of life, and insisted that I must try to find you. She thought, and still thinks, no doubt, that she had something in her possession which, in common justice, should belong to you. Was it one of my advertisements that found you at last?"

"I never saw one," declares the wanderer. "I simply grew tired of the west and came back to see if any one was left at the old place. At Philadelphia I heard that Ellen was married, and that you lived here. I found your address here without much trouble."

"Of course." It is still Mr. Jermyn who speaks. "How long have you been in the city?"



"Three days."

"What! and you did not seek us out at once?"

"To tell the truth, I had a friend with me; we came from Frisco together, and he wanted to do the city. I knew you didn't expect me and couldn't be disappointed, so I went the rounds with him; he went to Chicago this morning."

"Of course you will come to us now," Mr. Jermyn says affably; "Ellen expects that."

"Oh of course," Mrs. Jermyn says, not too eagerly. "I will have a room prepared for you at once, Carl."

"Well," says this excellent comedian, giving the elegant room a leisurely survey, "I didn't exactly think of it when I came; but I don't believe I could do better. You're pretty comfortable here, Ellen. It's an improvement, on the whole, upon the old place."

And so Richard Stanhope, whom for a time, we shall call, as he has chosen to call himself and to be called—Carl Jernyngham, became an inmate of this elegant home, and the three, each for a different reason, are mutually satisfied with this arrangement.

At Mrs. Jermyn's suggestion it is Carl, instead of herself, who drives with Mr. Jermyn, and when they are gone she goes again to her boudoir, again brings out the leather-bound, golden-clasped volumes, and sits down to search their pages. This time she begins with the first volume and makes her way through one after the other, passing over some of the closely written pages with a rapid glance, lingering over others, reading and rereading them, and seeming, by the noiseless movement of her lips, to be trying to fix certain words and phrases in her memory.

It is nearing the dinner hour when Mr. Jermyn and his newly found relative return; and the former, coming to the boudoir door, finds her still occupied with the russet

volumes. She looks up as he enters, but does not put aside the book in her hands, and for a moment they contemplate each other in silence.

"By mutual agreement," he says finally, "we have ignored certain topics, and we need not discuss them at length, now; but—we must understand each other." He is as placid as ever; if he feels anxiety it would seem to be for her, rather than for himself.

"Well," she says interrogatively.

"Do you feel any apprehension?"

"About what?"

"About—your brother."

She looks down at the volume in her lap, and flutters its leaves.

"No," she says, "why should I?" and then as he remains silent, "Have you formed an opinion?" she asks.

"About him?"

"Yes."

"I think he would accept a little money. I *don't* think he is local in his tastes."

"Precisely my opinion." She rises and puts the book upon the table. "I think there is really not much cause for anxiety, if he wants money—"

"By all means let him have it."

"Leave it to me," she says, "let me manage it in my own way; I'll know his intentions, soon."

"I mean to leave him to you; and I rejoice to leave him in such capable hands. Don't be niggardly, my dear—we can afford to be liberal."

Late that night Richard Stanhope is pacing up and down the room at his hotel which, on the morrow he is to abandon, for an apartment more elegant, under the roof of the woman who is, to him, a veritable sphinx.

He has promised to "pack his traps" and present himself on the morrow, but the packing is not yet begun. He has been walking, and smoking, and thinking, for more than an hour, occasionally breaking out into muttered, exclamatory speech, and his cheeks are flushed, and his eyes sparkling with excitement.

With the surprise which Mrs. Jermyn's face has given still upon him, he has encountered another and almost equally startling surprise.

While he was bowing with *debonair* grace to the husband of Mrs. E. Percy Jermyn, the fine smooth-shaven blonde face flashed upon his memory as not unfamiliar; and then, as their hands touched, in another flash; while Mr. Jermyn, turning his head for one instant to glance at his wife, gave him a glimpse of his profile, he recalled the occasion.

On a February night, in front of the Hotel Victor where the body of a murdered woman lay in carnival state, he has seen, by the glare of the gas-lights, falling full upon it, this clear-cut blonde profile—seen it as a haunting vision—seen it to ponder over it, to be perplexed, and finally baffled, finding no answer to his query, "*where* had he seen that face before?"

Away with the thought of coincidence here! His hand has touched something tangible; this blonde and blameless aristocrat has poised himself midway between the two Bertha's, the one with the black hair turned to gold, the other with black, black hair. The one lying low in Upton church-yard; the other queening it in a metropolitan palace.

His chief interest is no longer in the woman who has given him her brother's place and name; he has almost forgotten poor Charlie Jenkins, and his interests. He has a new purpose: To trace backward from New York to New Orleans, from May to February, from E. Percy



Jermyn in his laboratory, to the blonde apparition of a moment, under the lights of the Hotel Victor.

He moves about his room restlessly; the night, already half spent, is to him too long. He is as full of nervous, vibrating activity as a war-horse in the thick of the fray.

Finally he ceases his restless pacing to and fro, and begins his preparations for the morrow. He will take only that which is needful, and leave, in safe hands, anything that might excite the curiosity of inquiring minds; he will leave no opportunities to chance. Chance is too capricious a friend or a foe, as the occasion offers.

He has still in his possession the letters of Bertha Warham, her photograph, and some lines from Carnes and Lewis Jones. These last he will destroy, the others, Bertha's picture and letters he will deposit for safe keeping with Jones, who is again in New York.

Stop, there is something else! In his pocket book there are telegrams, cards, receipts, the things that naturally find their way into the pocket of a man who travels, observes, and is methodical in business. He will look these over and destroy those that must have passed their usefulness, or are no longer needed for reference.

He takes out the big pocket-book and spreads it open before him. Telegrams are in one compartment, cards, bills, receipts in another; bits of memoranda in a third; in another—the last, an accumulation of months, not so carefully assorted as are the others—some photographs, the counterparts of which might be found in the Rogues' Gallery; some newspaper clippings, cards bearing notes or addresses, advertisements, what-not, each having then, or in time past, its significance and use.

Stanhope takes out this miscellaneous collection, and begins to shuffle off the little heap like a card-player,

glancing at each card or clipping, as it slips through his fingers. Presently a slip of folded paper comes uppermost; he takes both hands to open it, then drops the heap, leans back in his chair, looks again at the open paper in his hand, and rising slowly, lifts his arms above his head with a gesture of triumph.

"*Eureka!*" he says aloud, triumphantly. "The plot thickens! but the sky clears!"

He holds in his hand the penciled sketch made by Rufus Carnes, long before—the profile head of the ex-convict, "number 46."

## CHAPTER LX

### AN OUTBREAK

In spite of his late hours of the previous night, Stanhope is up and abroad at an unfashionably early hour. He has business with Lewis Jones, his friend, and he keeps that young man fasting, sitting in his bedroom, talking rapidly and earnestly, while Jones, who has tumbled out of bed to admit him, shaves himself, makes a careful toilet, and afterward sits patiently listening, until Stanhope has spoken his last word.

"By Jove!" Jones says then, "you take my breath away! I never heard anything like it. If I wasn't so hungry I'd like to hear it all over again! It's *a stunner!*"

"If you're so hungry," says his visitor rising, "we had better breakfast together; I'm hungry too. But no more talk of this outside of your door. I may depend upon you?"

"Why of course; I'm not at all sure that I see your game—yet. But I'll follow your lead. I'll have an understanding with manager W—at once; there won't be any trouble about *him*. And I'll hunt up Weston; that may take longer, he's so migratory."

"Well, he said that a letter addressed as I have told you, would reach him within the week and that will be soon enough. I'll be around again in a few days. Of course if we happen to meet elsewhere we won't know each other, for the present."

"Oh, *that's* all right!" Jones laughs lightly and claps on



his hat. "If you want to be recognized by *me* you must introduce yourself. Is that it?"

"That's it—for the present."

When they are out upon the street Stanhope says carelessly:

"Oh, by the way, we are to have Baring in town presently."

"Baring! Well, that's pleasant news. What brings *him* North?"

"Well, he's in Chicago now, I suppose; I don't know what his business is. I was informed by telegram that he would be at the Avenue soon."

"I'll keep a lookout for him, then—I drop in on the Avenue almost every day."

Before luncheon-time the counterfeit Carl Jernyngham has arrived with his luggage, and is cozily domesticated in a luxurious chamber, in Mrs. Jermyn's up-town residence. He sits at luncheon opposite Mr. Jermyn, with his counterfeit step-sister midway between the two, and all are in good spirits, or seem to be—all quite at ease. And they are truly a fine looking trio.

If Stanhope has felt any doubt as to the expediency or success of this masquerade, he has thrown those doubts to the winds. He is *sure* of its expediency now, and determined upon its success; and, whether he passes his hours in-doors or out, lounging and smoking in Mr. Jermyn's study, watching his operations in his laboratory, or driving with him behind his excellent trotters, he knows there will come to him no moment of *ennui*, for every look, every word, every gesture of this placid, scholarly, courteous, blonde man, will be to him of keenest interest; he is a profound problem to be solved; a polished riddle, that must be read; an Achilles to whose vulnerable part encased in its triple armor, he must penetrate, like Paris of old.

And Mrs. Jermyn, still more a mystery, a sphinx, with her graceful, perfect manners, her straightforward glances, her low, soft-spoken words, what can he think of her? how convince himself of her real motives? her true purpose?

When he has been two days in the house he is still upon the threshold of his observations; he thinks that he has noted in Mrs. Jermyn a little more reserve, and silence and dignity of bearing, when in her husband's presence, than he had found in her at their first two interviews; but he cannot be sure of this, or her knowledge of the part they are both playing, of the deception they are practicing upon Mr. Jermyn may account for it—if the change does exist.

For reasons that are a combination of prudence and delicacy, he has avoided any chance *tete-a-tete* with his supposed sister, and she has manifested no desire to talk with him alone, but when, on the second day she unbends a little, converses more than usual and seems almost gay, he feels sure that Mr. Jermyn looks on with a half-smile of approval.

"I am going out in my cart," Mr. Jermyn says when luncheon is over. "I must call at one or two places downtown, then I can drive where you like. Do you feel like trying the road, Jernyngham?"

"I think you are growing selfish, Percy," his wife breaks in. "You have taken Carl out twice; I was about to ask him to go to the park with me."

He smiles indulgently.

"Were you? Then Jernyngham, you must choose between us—of course I don't withdraw my invitation, but—"

"Then I will decline it," interposes Stanhope. "As it is my sister's first invitation I really must."

Jermyn smiles again, and goes away smiling, leaving the two for the first time alone.

When he is gone, Mrs. Jermyn approaches one of the long windows that overlook the street, and drawing forward a low chair, and adjusting the curtains so that she may sit in their shadow and yet have an eye upon the entrance, she says, quite gently:

"Will you sit near me, Mr. Stanhope, so that we can converse easily without danger of being overheard? I never *feel* quite safe, quite sure of being alone, I mean, although I know, my better judgment tells me, that I *am* quite safe."

"If that is your feeling," he says, bringing forward a chair, and sitting so near that he could touch her with his hand, "you are unwise in addressing me as you did just now. We *are* quite safe to say what we like to each other so long as we do not forget our relationship. Call me Carl, please; and do not be offended if, even when we are alone, I call you as your husband does—Ellen."

"You are right," she says quite humbly, "call me Ellen by all means. I am glad of this opportunity to talk with you. Tell me, now that you have seen him, what is your opinion of Mr. Jermyn? Do you understand my reason for persuading you into this masquerade *now*?"

"Candidly, I do not. Nor do I understand your husband. Is he always as I have seen him?—serene, grave, tolerant, a blonde Chesterfield?"

"Always; I never saw him ruffled; I never heard his voice raised in anger. I never saw his eyes flash or his hand tremble."

"Then, if he is as gentle as he seems, why the necessity for this acting? If he is not inclined to dictate—"

"To *dictate*!" she laughs bitterly, and her eyes flash. "Oh no! he never dictates—he *rules* without appeal; I never saw his eyes flash with anger, but I have seen them pierce and cut like keen blue steel. His hand does



not tremble, but it shuts upon you like a hand of iron, always in its velvet glove; he would utter a curse, or pronounce a death-warrant in that same slow, even tone, and he would smile that same slow smile while his victim perished. He never laughs. Oh, I wonder sometimes in what school he learned that awful calm, that monstrous, smiling self-control; it would deceive the very elect!"

She pauses a moment, and then hurries on as if driven out of herself by some inward thought or vision:

"If any one had told me when I knew him first, at *any* time in fact, before I became his wife, that that man possessed a will of iron, a nature that pressed down all before it, that recognized no law but that of his own inclinations—no that is not the word—determinations, I should have laughed them to scorn. I thought it was I who possessed the strong will, I who could bend others to my purpose. Fool that I was, and am!" She catches her breath as if to check the torrent of words, then hurries on, with a red spot glowing and growing on either cheek.

"If I had said to him, Carl Jernyngham is in prison, I must spend thousands of dollars to help him out; if I had told him the story as you told it to me, he would have smiled, one of his slow smiles, and said: 'Very well, my dear, I will make it my business to investigate this matter; it may be an imposture, a fiction to get your money.' Perhaps he would say: 'Fill me a check, I will go to him at once;' he would take the money, perhaps he would go, and he would tell me a straightforward, plausible story full of detail, as realistic as Zola. But *some day* I would read in the paper that Charlie Jenkins had been hanged for murder."

Again she catches her breath; again hurries on.

"That is why I asked you to come here; *that* is why

I begged you to help me. You are as strong as he; I believe you are braver. *He* cannot say you are not Carl Jernyngham. He knows little, almost nothing about Carl Jernyngham. But he is keen, clever, watchful. That is why I do not begin to talk of old times, and try to give you cues. But I am going to tell you of past things. I want you to bring them forward as if they were fresh in your memory. You must convince him that you *are* a Jernyngham. Oh, I wish you could make him fear you a little! Listen! I have taken no steps to convince myself that the story you have told me is true. But if you said to me this moment, that Carl Jernyngham was not in danger, not in prison, I would ask you but one question. I *will* ask that question: Are you here as my friend or my enemy?"

He smiles and leans toward her.

"How could I, a stranger, be your enemy?" he says softly. "How could *any man*? Before I say more tell me—do you need a friend?"

She clasps her white hands and lifts them for a moment to her face.

"*Do I!* More than a child needs its mother! The poorest beggar in the street is not more friendless than I!"

"Then—whatever else I may be, I am your friend. But I am also the ambassador, without his knowledge, of Carl Jernyngham. His life is at stake."

"I believe you. But if I did not, and still believed in your friendship for me, I would give you half the Jernyngham fortune and trust to your honor to find and share it with Carl—rather than let it go little by little through my hands into those of Percy Jermyn!"

She speaks the name as if it blistered her tongue.

"There," she says, sighing heavily and letting her eyes fall before his gaze, "I never thought of saying all this

to you, but perhaps it is best. My husband is not a man, he is simply a will, a law unto himself and others, all the more powerful because of his calm, his immovability—his correct tastes and habits. Oh! he is perfect—of his kind."

"What did you wish to tell me."

"Thank you for bringing me back to that. It will be necessary to do something for Carl soon. And this is my plan: Near Chicago, not more than fifty miles away, I have friends, the Barings; there are two brothers, John and Jacob Baring; they went to Roseville from the east, about the time that you—Carl—left home for the first time. Jacob Baring has a son; you knew him when you were both boys. Kenneth is the younger of the two, younger than you, you know. John Baring has two daughters; you are not expected to remember *them*. Now I want you to talk about these people, to manifest a desire to see them, to propose a visit to them after a time; this must be our pretext for going to Chicago."

Stanhope withdraws his eyes from her face lest she should see the quick look of gratification that flashes in them. The opportunity he has most wished for has come.

"I will do as you wish," he says. "I am more than ever anxious to serve you. But let me suggest something: It is difficult to talk much of things of which we know little, and it will be neither safe nor wise to hold many of these interviews. When you have a suggestion to make, information to give, condense it as much as possible and put it into writing. You can easily slip a note into my hand at luncheon, or when we are all chatting here. And I can say anything I may wish to say to you in the same way. If the notes



are destroyed as soon as read there can be no danger."

Her excitement has died away, leaving her quite pale and languid; she is looking at him through half-closed lids.

"Perhaps that will be best," she says dreamily. "Let that be the understanding between us. But"—turning to look out upon the street, "we must not move too fast."

For some moments they sit in silence, he studying her face, she with eyes turned street ward; then she moves suddenly, turning in her easy-chair so that her back is toward the light, her face in the shadow of the curtains.

"That murder," she says in a low tone, a little husky too, it sounds to him; "I read all that you gave me, and it was more than enough. You say that this detective—your friend, is sure that Carl is not guilty of her death; do you—does *he* know who the murderer is?"

"He believes that the guilty man is a relative of Mrs. Warham's."

"A relative! what relative?"

"A young man who was madly in love with Mrs. Warham's step-daughter; the girl who ran away. There is considerable evidence against him, I am told."

"Then why was not *he* arrested? Why is *he* at large?"

"He is not at large. He is in a mad-house. If he were a sane man, he would be in a prison cell now."

"Oh! and the girl—what became of her?"

"She is dead."

"*Dead!*" every vestige of color has left her face.

"Yes. A body was identified as being that of the run-

away girl; I think it was in some large city. It was sent to her home and buried there."

"Oh! how *strange!*" She pushes back her chair, rises quickly, and walks across the room. "We were going to drive," she says, after a moment of silence. "And it is growing late. I will ring for the carriage." She moves forward a pace, pauses, lifts a hand to her head, and half-turning as if to reach a support, she totters, and but for his prompt spring would have fallen. He half-leads, half-carries her to the nearest chair, and then looks searchingly down into her face. "Are you ill?" he asks gently.

She breathes heavily and is silent for a moment, then, "It is over," she says faintly. "I—I have had an attack like this before—it is nothing." She makes an attempt to rise and then sinks back. "You *are* ill," he declares and puts a finger upon her wrist. "You are not well enough to drive."

"Oh, yes." She is deadly pale still, but this time she rises and walks half-way across the room. "I *want* to go. The air will do me good." She crosses to the door and turns there. "I will go to my room; if you will call the carriage I will be down soon," and she goes out quite steadily but pale—so pale!

"Oh!" murmured Stanhope, as he rang the bell, "That struck home. But can it be that she does not know—can it be—am I wrong *again?*" And he begins to pace the room, perplexed, and beset with a new anxiety.

## CHAPTER LXI

### LINK TO LINK

When Mr. Jermyn returns from his solitary drive it is late, almost dinner-time; Mrs. Jermyn and Mr. Jernyng-ham have returned, the footman tells him, and he goes straight to his wife's dressing-room.

She opens the door in answer to his knock; she is dressed for dinner, and one of the russet volumes is in her hand.

"Still studying!" he says. "You must be careful of those volumes."

"I am," she replies coldly. "I knew it was your knock."

He passes her, and goes toward the table, taking something from his pocket the while.

"I have just received this," he says, holding it out to her. "But it should have reached us three days ago. It's from Mrs. Jacob Baring."

"Oh!" There is annoyance, perhaps alarm, in the single syllable.

"Kenneth Baring was married, let's see, three, no four days ago. They come at once to New York."

"Then they must be here now." There is the light of a growing excitement in her eyes.

"Yes, probably. Read the letter at your leisure. Mrs. Baring revels in detail. We will talk matters over after dinner. I think that I will look them up to-



morrow, or shall we call together? Of course you will have to ask them to come here."

"Oh, of course."

"I don't think however that Mrs. Baring, Rene, will accept."

"Why not?"

"Perhaps you will be so good as to remember," that slow smile is overspreading his face, "that you were a trifle *jealous* of Miss Brian; that your manner toward her, on our wedding-day, was—for a lady—almost aggressive."

"I am not likely to forget anything that you choose to have me remember " she says curtly, and he goes out with the enigmatical smile still upon his lips.

When he is gone Mrs. Jermyn closes and locks the door of her boudoir, and going back to the little table upon which the ebony box still stands, sits down beside it, and draws Mrs. Baring's letter from its envelope.

This is what she reads:

"MY DEAR ELLEN:—It is so long since I have received a letter from your own hand that I almost think I would not be penning this now, if the occasion did not make it a social necessity. Not that I do not appreciate, and enjoy Mr. Jermyn's letters; they are models of penmanship and diction; but it seems to me that you *must* be getting well enough by now to favor your friends with your own autograph. Do you know that it is fully six months since I have received a letter written by yourself, and yet Mr. Jermyn writes that you are improving in health daily; that you are growing younger and handsomer, and developing a charming vein of vivacity.

"But enough on this subject; I took up my pen to

tell you about Kenneth Baring's marriage. It has come to that. I felt sure it would, when Mr. Baring's sickness made it necessary to send for Kenneth; he talked about him every day, and it was really a relief to me when Lotta came and told me that she knew where to write to him, and that, in fact, she had already written him; she and Rene had talked the matter over and had decided that they ought to write. She was saucy enough to add that *I* might telegraph for appearance sake, but that Rene, learning how ill Mr. Baring was, had written Kenneth that he ought to come home, and that he would be sure to do as Rene thought right. Well, I did telegraph—"for appearance sake"—and, as you know, Kenneth came.

"I have written you of Lotta's engagement with young Brian, and that they would be married as soon as he was sure of that position at Washington. Well, that has been secured for him; and I must say that he is a very worthy young man; one of the sort who is bound to "get on." Brian must be in Washington at a given time, and they began to hurry the wedding preparations, for of course he must take Lotta. And then without consulting *me*, Mr. Baring concocts a plan, sees Rene—he had seen her often during his illness—overcomes all her scruples, and telegraphs Kenneth that he is to come home and be married. When I heard of this, and remonstrated with him, he said: 'Stuff and nonsense, Mrs. B—. I'm going to have my way this once, if I never do again. The girl can't stay here alone, and I don't want her to be compelled to follow her brother to Washington; she's a good girl but she's as proud as you, and Charlie has made sacrifices for her already. Ken. has shown himself deserving; I'm proud of the fellow. I'm

going to give him money enough to buy a snug little home in New Orleans and keep the wolf from the door, while he earns his practice. Don't argue; I've talked down Rene, and she's consented. Ken.'s coming home, and they're *going to be married.*'

"What could I do after that but order a new gown for the wedding and make the best of the inevitable.

"They will be married in church, both pair of them, and set out together on their travels; Lotta goes to Washington at once, and Kenneth and Rene will visit New York, among other places. I think it is to be New York first. They travel together to Chicago—it's one of the peculiarities of this region that no matter where one wishes to go, it must be by the way of Chicago. I suppose you will see them when they reach your city.

"The Rooseveltdt girls will return from Europe some time this summer, and then I shall have them here; and I shall hope to have *you* too. It is so long since I have seen you. Write and say that you and your husband will come to us for the summer, or a part of it, at least, and think of me as your ever attached friend,

"HENRIETTA BARING."

When Mrs. Jermyn has perused this letter a second time, she puts it aside, ponders for a moment, and then going to her writing-desk, she pencils, with much thought, and frequent pauses, a note to Stanhope.

She tells him in this note that Kenneth Baring is coming to the city; that he will have to meet him, and that she will try to convey as much information on the subject as she can in a second note, which she will write that evening and put into his hand in the morning—at that time she can say no more.

Stanhope receives this note as they are passing in to



dinner, and when dinner is over he goes for a moment to his room, reads it with eagerness, and a new light, that sign in him of growing excitement, in his eyes. He re-reads the note and then sits looking at it fixedly; finally he jumps up, stows it away in his pocket and goes back to the drawing-room. He is in good spirits all that evening. He engages his pretended sister in conversation, and she too seems to catch the contagion of his suppressed excitement; but nothing is said about the Barings. Mrs. Jermyn, for reasons of her own, will not take the initiative, and Mr. Jermyn seems to have forgotten the subject altogether.

It has grown late and Stanhope has bidden them a gay good night, and turned toward the door. when Mr. Jermyn says in his soft even voice,

"Have you told your brother about the Baring wedding, Ellen?"

It is the critical moment. He swings around with eyes wide and interested.

"By Jove!" he cries ingenuously, "if I hadn't almost forgotten the Barings! A wedding, did you say? Why, whose?"

"The young man's—young Baring." It is the gentleman who answers, and as he speaks, the lady darts at Stanhope a swift glance of encouragement, and gratification at his acting.

"Kenneth!" he says eagerly. "He's the only young man I remember. John Baring had two or three girls. I don't remember much about them. Girls didn't strike me favorably in those days. But Ken. was a fine fellow. Is it his wedding?"

"Yes, it's Kenneth's," Mrs. Jermyn now says, relieved

that the ice is broken. "He's married and coming to New York with his bride. Are you getting ready to hear all about it, Carl?" for the young man has perched himself upon the arm of a chair and turned an eager face toward her. "Don't, I beg of you. I don't feel equal to it, and Percy is not a good gossip. Let's talk it over to-morrow."

"Just as you say." He slides from his seat with a whimsical, boyish gesture. "But I *shall* be glad to see Ken. Baring again. When does he come?"

"We don't know, but it may be to-morrow. Good night, Carl."

In the morning the second note is slipped into his hand. It gives him considerable information about the Barings, but it is not the information that especially interests him.

He does not destroy the note, nor has he destroyed its predecessor and herald. Instead, he sets out soon after breakfast, with the two notes in his pocket, going straight to the room occupied by Lewis Jones. He finds the amiable journalist at home, and they remain for an hour closeted together, with numerous letters and notes spread out on the table between them.

When at last Stanhope parts from Jones, at the foot of the stairway that leads from his door into the street, the two notes announcing the coming of Kenneth Baring and his bride, are left behind, safely tied up with other letters, and waiting his pleasure in the little reporter's writing-desk; while a key, the duplicate of the one carried by Jones, and which admits him to his room by day or night, reposes, instead of the two notes, in Stanhope's pocket.

## CHAPTER LXII

### A MEETING OF BIOGRAPHERS

The afternoon is one of the brightest of May, and Richard Stanhope, scrupulously dressed, handsome and animated, sits in a close cab that is drawn up at the entrance on the side of the street opposite the hotel where Kenneth Baring and his pretty bride have been registered since yesterday. He has been in that vicinity for nearly an hour, driving slowly up or down past the great caravansary, sometimes darting around the block, now to the right, then to the left, always sitting far back in the cab, and always glancing as he passes, toward a handsome carriage drawn up before the ladies' entrance.

It has been there so long now, far beyond the limits of a fashionable call, that he knows it soon must go, and so he orders the driver to draw up on the opposite side of the way, putting his head out of the window farthest from the waiting carriage in so doing; and now, as he sits silent but not impatient, he sees the liveried driver rouse himself, and the footman spring nimbly down, and he knows that they are coming. Yes, there they are—a graceful, handsome blonde man, and a fair-faced, dark-haired lovely woman in the daintiest of toilets.

When they are within the carriage, and the driver has received his directions, and is reining his prancing horses out into the crowded street, the blonde man bends toward the lovely woman, and says:

"Well! having seen Mrs. Baring, do you like her better than you did?"



"She is a lovely creature," responds the lady; "yes, I like her."

"And yet," smiling a slow, enigmatical smile, "you did not urge your point as I expected, or hoped that you would."

"What point?"

"That she, and her good looking husband should come and abide under our roof."

"I don't want them to come!" she speaks sharply and turns her shoulder toward her companion.

"Really!" Is there a suspicion of cynicism in the smile still hovering about his mouth? "I should think you would have urged the point for Jernyngham's sake. He would surely enjoy the society of his old friend. And he would admire his friend's wife, as a matter of course. He couldn't help it."

She does not answer, and she keeps her face averted, and so they drive home in utter silence.

When they have left the carriage at their own door, he follows her silently up the marble steps, into the wide hail and across to the foot of the staircase. Here he lays a lightly detaining hand upon her arm.

"Mrs. Jermyn," he says and his calm voice is even lower, and slower, and, she thinks calmer than usual. "Don't let your interest in your newly found brother become *solicitude*; it is not sisterly, and not *wise*."

A wave of crimson oversweeps her face, she dashes aside his hand, gathers her silken skirts about her, and runs swiftly up the stairs.

Meanwhile Stanhope, seeing the carriage disappear, descends from the cab, dismisses it, and threads his way across the street to the entrance of the big hotel, and heralded by a prompt servant, is soon standing in the little parlor occupied by Kenneth Baring and Rene.

They are both in the room, and Stanhope fancies, even

while young Baring is greeting him with hands extended and glowing eyes, that both wear a look of suppressed excitement; and he wonders, while bowing before Baring's young wife, if her eyes always flash and sparkle so; if her cheeks wear usually that roseate tint? if she looks always so startled and tremulous, and vividly sweet?

"You have given me a surprise," he says, turning to Baring after the greetings and words of congratulation are uttered. "I heard from Carnes that you were coming here—but never would have guessed how."

And both young men glanced at Rene Baring, the one with admiration, the other with pride.

Baring laughs.

"It was on my mind to tell you," he says, "but you were so preoccupied; and in fact there was no time; after I made that last discovery, and made it known to you—there wasn't much chance for talking about my affairs. If I had tried to tell you while we were on our way home, I doubt if I could have got more than half a hearing. If you remember you were somewhat preoccupied—for you."

"I believe that I was," Stanhope smiles and looks from one to the other; he looks less preoccupied than his host, just now.

"Stanhope," says Baring with sudden gravity, "how did you come up? Did you meet any one? Did you see a ghost?"

"Is this house haunted? Do ghosts walk in daytime?"

"I begin to think so. If you should tell me that the dead get out of their graves and go out calling—"

"Accompanied by blonde gentlemen?" suggested Stanhope.

"What! then you did see them?"

"If you mean the lady and her escort who just drove away from the hotel, yes."

"And the resemblance! Did you see that?"

"Distinctly."

"By Jove! excuse me, Rene, sit down Stanhope. I'm a bit excited; the fact is we were just comparing notes, my wife and I; we were both a bit excited when you were announced."

Stanhope looks alert and interested, but he does not pursue the subject; instead he turns to Mrs. Kenneth Baring, upon whose face he had detected a look, directed toward her husband, one of those glances which women so well know how to give, and which can be made to convey so much, this look seems to say "please don't say any more," so he ignores the ghost, and the resemblance, and begins a light conversation about New York, the season, their journey, the things to be seen, and the things not worth seeing; he addresses himself to the lady and her young husband, pleased to see them get on so well, drops out of the conversation almost entirely, content to look alternately at the wife whom he loves, and the friend whom he prizes and admires with such wholeheartedness. As they talk he smiles, glad to see that Rene is quite cheery and at her ease, and that Stanhope seems pleased and full of admiration for his pretty, clever little wife; and while the young husband enjoys these reflections, Stanhope also has an undercurrent of thought, while he talks and listens to Rene.

"She is pretty," that is his first conclusion, and then as the conversation progresses, "she has keen perceptions, she is quick-witted, she is honest, she is courageous. One might depend upon her in an emergency."

Rene too has her impressions, of her guest clearly outlined and they are summed up in this mental comment: "He *is* handsome; Ken. didn't exaggerate; I like him."

When they are all quite at their ease, Stanhope turns again to Baring and brings him back to the subject of the ghost.



"So you really saw that remarkable resemblance, Baring?" he says with a smile.

"Saw it—I should think so!"

"Does Mrs. Baring understand our allusions?" he looks over at Rene, and his smile seems to say, I should not object if she did.

"In part," replies Baring. "I told Rene something of my detective experience, as much in fact as I had any right to tell. I had to brag a little—about my essay as a detective."

Stanhope smiles again, and looks again at Rene. "I assure you that it was not a bad beginning, Mrs. Baring. I shouldn't mind trying him again, with your permission."

"It was a horrible thing," she says gravely—then—"Do you think a married man makes a good detective, Mr. Stanhope? I should make him tell me all about it."

"Well, if I don't object to *that* will you lend him to me?"

"I don't know," her face becoming mischievous. "I don't think that Kenneth has given me more than half-confidence. He did not go into details; in fact, Mr. Stanhope, I got a better idea of *you* than I did of this strange murder."

"Oh—ha!" says Baring triumphantly; "but you can't say, madam, that you were not more interested in him than in the rest of the subject!"

"Well," with a little laugh, "Mr. Stanhope was a more cheerful subject for contemplation, and more clearly defined. You know you let me get my ideas of the murder chiefly from the newspaper clippings, but you *told* me of Mr. Stanhope and his achievements, and you were very graphic—enthusiastic in fact," then turning to survey Stanhope with renewed interest, "and you took that poor girl's body home, Mr. Stanhope, and saw it buried;

you saw her friends, and had to tell them the dreadful story. What an ordeal for them—and for you!”

“Yes,” he says, “it *was* an ordeal greater than you can imagine, and I fear that the worst is to come.”

“You mean the finding of the murderer, and his punishment? surely you can’t think that worse than the deed?”

“No, I dare say it would seem worse to him. But I did not mean that. I fear you don’t know how good a detective your husband is after all, Mrs. Baring. Has he told you that he has made a discovery that may change the aspect of the entire case?” then, seeing her hesitate and look perplexed, he turns again toward Baring and says:

“I have heard from Carnes by telegraph.”

Baring shoots him a warning glance.

“I have said nothing about that business,” he says uneasily. “It was an unpleasant subject, to begin with—and then I wanted to see *you* first; I did not feel at liberty to tell it.”

“Kenneth,” says his wife rising and coming nearer the two men, “you two have something to say to each other; *that* is evident, and I am not in the secret. Don’t protest, Mr. Stanhope. Of course you will have to let me in eventually; in the meantime I am going to leave you to a *tete-a-tete*; if I don’t you will go outside and have it in spite of me. Perhaps I can overhear you, if you will kindly raise your voice a little, and if I listen at the key-hole. Mr. Stanhope, I make only one request: don’t run away as soon as you two have compared notes; wait and let me say good-bye to you, and ask you to come again.”

There is no hint of pique, sarcasm or double meaning in her words; and she does not give them time to protest; but, laughing a frank cheery little laugh, she opens the door of an inner room, and favoring them with a little courtesy, disappears within.

"Baring," says Stanhope, with his eyes fixed upon the door that has shut her in, and shut them out, "where did you get that incomparable wife? Is there another like her?"

"No," retorts Baring his face luminous, "There is *not* another like her, of course not! and—you may as well take your eyes off that door, she'll never be a widow—my health is excellent, and I mean to keep it so."

"Well, you're a lucky fellow," says his visitor. "I won't say any more now. Your wife has given us permission to talk business, so let it be business. What did you find at Upton?"

"Exactly what I expected."

For a moment they sit silent, regarding each other with serious faces, then—

"Didn't Carnes telegraph you that?" Baring asks.

"Yes, but I want it confirmed. I hate to believe the truth. Then it is *not* Bertha Warham that we buried at Upton!"

"It's a woman with black hair."

Stanhope rises, walks to the window, and looks down into the busy street; when he turns and comes back, he seats himself beside Baring upon the sofa, which, during the interview, the latter has occupied alone.

"When I came in," he says, with an abrupt change of topic, "you and your wife were comparing notes, you said. Will you tell me how you were impressed?"

"What, by that lady—that resemblance?"

Stanhope nods.

"How I was impressed? well, I was simply stunned. I never saw so startling a resemblance. But—why! do you know who that lady was?"

"Not to a certainty—do you?"

"Do I! why they were our visitors; Mrs. Jermyn and her husband; they are both strangers, or almost strangers



to me, but Rene knows them quite well—knew them before they were married, in fact."

"Oh!" there is something odd in the young detective's voice, and a look of increasing concentration and resolve in his face. "Baring, you had ought to know by this time whether my motives, my reasons for doing and saying queer things may be safely taken for granted or not. Are you willing to wait for explanations, and to tell me what I want to know?"

"Of course I am!"

"And will you vouch for me to your wife, if I should wish to ask something of her?"

"About the Jermyns, do you mean?"

"I mean about the Jermyns."

"Well, I don't think that will be necessary. Rene generally forms her own opinions, and I fancy she has no *very* bad opinion of you; as for me—I can't see what you are driving at—but blaze away; I'm open to catechism."

"Tell me about their call."

"About that? well it was a trifle unexpected. To tell the truth there was a little coolness between Rene and Mrs. Jermyn, dating back to Mrs. J—'s wedding-day, or even earlier. You see, Rene knew them both before they were married, and if I am to believe the stories of a jolly little cousin of mine, Mr. Jermyn admired Rene a little too openly to please his *fiancée*. At any rate we rather expected, and Rene heartily wished, our social intercourse with the Jermyns, during our stay here, to be ceremonious rather than cordial. We were therefore surprised a little when Mr. and Mrs. J— sent up their names and gave us in person a very cordial welcome to New York. I was so upset at sight of the lady that I was slow in pulling myself together again, and by the time I did, they were in the full tide of conversation with Rene.

From the little I had learned from Rene, and the more from Lotta, that's my jolly cousin, I was fully prepared to see no end of haughty coldness on the part of Mrs. E. P. Jermyn, and, knowing my little girl as I do, equally prepared to see her acquit herself with ease and self-possession, if not with absolute cordiality. Imagine my surprise then, when I found myself able to take observations, to see the ease and self-possession and cordiality all on the side of Mrs. Jermyn, and the constraint and coldness all manifested by Rene. Mr. Jermyn was just what I expected to see him, from Rene's description and Lotta's, and what I had gathered about him generally at Roseville, and I thought that Mrs. Jermyn—I had only a boy's remembrance of her, as a haughty young Miss—was acquitting herself splendidly. But Rene, I couldn't account for *her* conduct. If she had seen the photograph of Bertha Warham, I might have done so, but you will remember that I did not possess such a picture; otherwise she *might* have seen it. And why she should seem so stiff and constrained, and turn first white and then red I couldn't imagine.

"Mrs. J.—invited us very cordially to come and take up our abode with them; of course I expected Rene to decline, and this she did; but not with the polite calm that she is capable of, and that I expected of her, and Mrs. J.—did not press the matter as much as one might have anticipated from the warmth of her first invitation. *He* repeated the invitation, and urged it upon us, but she did not second him heartily. Well sir, when they went, I turned to Rene to ask a question, and caught the queerest look upon her face. As I have said, she knew Ellen Jernyngham quite well the summer before her marriage; Ellen spent that summer in Roseville, and they met almost daily; so you may imagine my surprise when she caught me by the arm with both hands and cried: 'Ken! *Ken!* that is not Ellen Jernyngham.'

"*'What.'*" cries Stanhope, starting up.

"*'That is not Ellen Jernyngham,'* she says again; and then before I take time to think I cry out—

"*'Whoever it is, it's the very image of the girl who was poisoned in New Orleans!'* Then Rene dropped down into a chair all in a tremor of nervousness, and just as I began to collect my senses, and try to calm her, you were announced."

Again Stanhope swings round and walks to the window.

"Baring," he says, turning after a moment's silence, "will you ask your wife to come back? and try to persuade her to tell me of this—this strange sensation of hers, in her own way? will you ask her to tell me all that she *can* about her earliest acquaintance with Mr. Jermyn—and his wife? Go to her, Baring, use what arguments you please, and if she refuses, ask her to see me, at least, for a moment."

"She'll do that, of course," says young Baring, and he crosses the room, taps upon the inner door, then opens it and disappears within.

When they come out, the young husband with his arm linked within that of his wife, Stanhope is standing beside the window, looking down upon the street, cool, collected, and half-smiling.

"Mrs. Baring," he says, advancing and placing a chair for her, "don't let that newly fledged detective of yours mystify you too much. I am going to tell you my motive and meaning, if you will kindly permit me, and if you will let me ask you a few questions—"

"If I can tell you what you wish to know by answering any number of questions, Mr. Stanhope," she says, taking the proffered seat and looking up frankly into his face, "the best way is to begin at once. If you ask me something that I cannot answer, or have no right to answer—"



"I shall not do that," he breaks in, "and before I put my first question I would better say this: It is very important that I should know certain things about Mr. Jermyn and his wife, and I believe that you can tell me much that I wish to know. If you can, and will, it will perhaps save me a journey to Roseville, and some valuable time besides. If you cannot—or will not—I will have my questions answered all the same—by someone else."

He says all this with that admirable smile of his, which conveys at once the impression of amiability, and inflexible purpose; and Rene laughs, and begins to feel more like her old, collected, piquant self.

"In that case," she says, "if I am only one stop, and you can easily pull out others when I fail to respond, my sense of responsibility is lessened, and my sense of my own importance too. Be seated again, Mr. Stanhope, and Kenneth shall hold *you* responsible for any error I may make in becoming too confidential. Now, Mr. Stanhope! I really feel very much like a blindfolded witness."

"You shall not remain long in the dark, Mrs. Baring. You are ready?—well then—when did you first see and know Mr. Jermyn?"

Rene considered for a moment.

"It was in early May, I think, more than a year ago, that I saw him first. It was some weeks later that I may be said to have made his acquaintance. I saw him and knew him first in Roseville."

"Rene," breaks in young Baring, "I *wish* you would tell Mr. Stanhope about that letter—it's really the only part of the story that he could not get from any other 'stop,' as you say, and I think that's the kind of information he wants."

"I want any kind of information," says Stanhope, "that

will help me to patch together a history of his career in Roseville. Can't you fancy me his biographer, Mrs. Baring, and give me details accordingly."

'Do you wish your biography to be laudatory or simply truthful, Mr. Stanhope? Because I warn you that I am not an unbiased narrator. I don't quite *like* Mr. Jermyn."

"Neither do I," says the detective promptly. "And I predict that we shall all like him less when his biography is completed. It's the truth I want—plain, unvarnished truth."

She flushes, hesitates and looks annoyed; then, as her eyes turn from the eager, asking face of her husband, to that of Stanhope, strong, serious and full of purpose, she says:

"You will have to hear a bit of my own 'biography,' if I tell you what Kenneth wishes, but I see that he very much wants me to tell you all that I can. If you really wish for details, I must put them into narrative form."

"Rene," breaks in Baring again, "tell your story to Mr. Stanhope just as you would tell it to me. Try to feel that you *are* telling it to me."

"I will tell it to you then," she says, a roguish smile flitting over her face, "I'll tell it to you, and Mr. Stanhope may listen."

And so they sit near the window in a friendly group, while Rene begins at the beginning—begins with Mrs. Brace and the letter from Ralph Foster Jermyn, Bart. and traces the career of Mr. Jermyn from the first day of his appearance in Roseville to the day on which he leaves it with Ellen Jernyngham as his bride.

## CHAPTER LXIII

### THREE STORIES

"Did you learn," asks Stanhope when Rene Baring has completed what she calls her "biographical sketch," and has paused for comment, "did you learn during Jermyn's stay in Roseville, or at any time since, anything more about himself, his past, his family?"

"Nothing. That letter, unearthed by Mrs. Brace, was his passport. None other was required of him, that ever I heard of. When it was known that he was going to marry Ellen Jernyngham, the most exclusive of all exclusives, no one presumed to question. Of course he must have enlightened *her*, or satisfied her as to his past, and his future too."

"It would seem, then," says Stanhope, "that he made yourself and your brother instrumental in bringing him forward—putting him in a favorable light, as you might say, before the people of Roseville—your people."

"Yes." Her face clouding. "That is true. I have often regretted it—rebelled against it. More than once we have talked it over—my brother and I. I think that toward the last he grew to share in what he at first laughed at, and called my prejudice. I think that toward the last he began to view him as I did."

"How?"

"In the light of a fortune hunter."

"A fortune hunter!" Stanhope relaxes somewhat his attentive attitude and smiles oddly. "Do you like to listen to stories? It has occurred to me while listening



to you that I have a story, two or three stories, in fact, that might interest you. Shall I tell one, the shortest one, as a specimen?"

"You are a queer fellow, Stanhope!" says young Baring. But I happen to know that you *can* tell a story and tell it well. It will be sure to interest you, Rene."

"I am interested already," says his pretty wife, drawing her low chair a little nearer him, and thus encouraged, Stanhope begins:

"In this story of mine I shall not enter into details; in fact I am not familiar with all the details. But I will assure you of this, it is a true story. It is easier for me to draw upon my memory than to invent, and the strangest stories that are ever told are always the ones that are truest. To begin then: It was something more than two years ago, nearly three in fact, when a strange bank robbery occurred, and a friend of mine, who is also an acquaintance of your husband's, Mrs. Baring, was employed to investigate the case. The name of this friend is Rufus Carnes, and he is a very able detective."

"I believe you," says Baring half to himself.

"In working out this case Carnes decided to get himself put in prison in order to be near, to be able to see daily, and, by special arrangement of course, to converse, now and then, with a man who was there under sentence of another crime, but who Carnes believed, had a hand in this before-mentioned bank-robbery. Carnes was known in prison as 'Number 43,' and his nearest neighbor, 'Number 46,' attracted his attention, interested him in fact. Well, when he had accomplished his purpose and was about to leave the prison, he found that this same 'Number 46,' had completed his time that day, and was about to leave also. Together, almost, they went out of the prison, each man going his separate way, when they were out of the gates.

"The day that saw them both released, found me at one of the great Chicago railway stations; there had been some daring trunk-robberies upon several railway lines, and I was agreeably engaged making myself familiar with the faces of no end of trunks. I saw my friend Carnes step off the train, and, as soon as I could, I followed him to his hotel; I had not seen him for months.

"I found him busily engaged in drawing a profile of his fellow-prisoner; Carnes might have succeeded as an artist I think, if he had not chosen, or been chosen by Fate, to be a detective. The man had impressed him as a criminal not of the usual type, and he talked about him with considerable interest." He pauses a moment and then adds, "I forgot to mention that this man, this 'Number 46,' was released from prison in early May, a year ago; two or three weeks, perhaps more, before *Mr. Jermyn* first dawned upon you, at Roseville."

Again he pauses, and this time so long that Rene begins to look her surprise, and Kenneth says impatiently:

"Well! what next?"

"Nothing next. That's the end of the story."

While they look blankly at each other, saying nothing, he takes a flat packet from his pocket, snaps off the rubber band that secures it, and says, "Some people prefer their stories illustrated; I think I do myself. I can give this story a frontispiece at least."

He has taken from the packet a square of paper, and this he now extends to Rene. "Look!" he says.

She takes it, looks at it mechanically, and then utters a quick ejaculation:

"Why! It is, *isn't* it, Mr. Jermyn?"

He says nothing, merely taking it from her hand and passing it on to Baring.

"Upon my word!" Baring says, after one keen glance, "*it is Jermyn.*"

"That 'illustration,'" says Stanhope slowly, "is the picture, drawn by my friend Carnes of 'Number 46,' the ex-convict."

"Mr. Stanhope!" cries Rene Baring, "what *can* you mean?"

"Are you in the mood to listen to another story?" he asks, not heeding her query, and pretending not to see the growing excitement in Baring's face. "If you are, Mrs. Baring, I will tell you about Bertha Warham—not merely all that your husband knows, but all that *I* know."

"Do," says Rene eagerly. "I can't understand your motive, but I am interested in that poor girl's fate."

So again they listen while Stanhope relates from the beginning to the end, all that he knows of this strange girl, and the mystery that enshrouds her fate—tells of Carnes and his work, of Mr. Warham, of Joseph Larsen, tracing step by step the intricacies of their search for the missing girl, with all their attendant results. He rehearses again the scenes at the Hotel Victor, the search in New Orleans; and then and last, he tells of Kenneth Baring's discovery of the golden locks that are *not* golden, and of his meeting with Rose Hildreth, and the information which she forced upon him. Then, without waiting for comment, he takes from the packet upon his knee another picture, a photograph this time, and placing it in her hand as before, says:

"That, Mrs. Baring, is the picture of Bertha Warham."

She utters a sharp cry, and the picture falls from her hand.

"What does it all mean?" she says, starting from her seat. "That picture—*surely* it is Ellen Jernyngham!"

"It is Bertha Warham," says Stanhope, gravely, and stooping he picks up the picture, and restores it to its place in the packet.



"Stanhope," cries Kenneth Baring, starting up in his turn, just as his wife again sits down, "what are you driving at? In heaven's name, have you any more stories to relate?"

"Yes," there is a stern ring in the detective's voice; "one more; but first a word of explanation: Baring, Mrs. Baring, I am taxing your patience I know; you are surprised that I should tell you these things, but it is necessary that I tell you yet more. I need your help, both of you; without it I may even fail in what I have undertaken."

"Our help?" says Baring. "Our help! You have mine; surely you know that I am at your disposal—but Rene—"

"Wait," says Stanhope—"let me say a word, Mrs. Baring; if it were made clear to you that a great wrong had been done one of your own sex, and you saw that, without danger or exertion on your part, simply by exercising a little tact, a little courage and self-possession, you could help to right this wrong, help to clear up a mystery, to unmask an impostor, to save an innocent man, and punish a guilty one, would you hesitate, or withhold your help?"

"No, not for one moment!"

"Baring, if you knew that a man, one near your own age, say one that you have known in your boyhood, was accused of the most brutal of crimes, was lying helpless, friendless, alone, in prison, awaiting trial, perhaps death, and if you were assured of his innocence, would not you go to him? would you not sacrifice time, pleasure, anything that you honestly could to save, or even to comfort him?"

"Good heavens! yes!" Baring is now aglow with excitement. "Stanhope *what* do you mean! Is there such a case?"

"Yes."

"Who! Where?"

"Carl Jernyngham is in a Chicago jail, accused of murder."

"Man, are you mad! Jernyngham is here in New York."

"Is he?"

"Yes. Only this moment they—Jermyn and his wife—told us that he was with them, in their own home."

"Perhaps they think so! Listen! there is a mystery in the Jermyn household, and I am trying to fathom it. It is I whom they call Carl Jernyngham. I came to New York in his interest, and to further my project I am masquerading under his name."

"You?"

"Yes, sit down again, Baring; we have come to my third story; it's about Carl Jernyngham."

Late that night, when half the world is asleep, Stanhope sits writing a long letter to Carnes. He has covered page after page with firm, rapid hand, and now, on the last, he is penning these words:

"Don't try to go further into his past; go to the old prison and trace his career from the day he left its walls until you land him safely in Roseville; or—much safer for him—somewhere else. *Connect the links*—that's all. If he is proven an ex-convict, the rest must be accomplished by a *coup*. Do this as quickly as possible, then come on. We are closing in.

Yours in suspense,

"STANHOPE."

## CHAPTER LXIV

### LINKS

During the week that follows they are very gay at the Jermyns'. It happens that they cannot make a party, and Rene does not visit Mrs. Jermyn's house except for the briefest of calls. But Baring is in and out frequently; he almost monopolizes the spurious Carl Jernyngham; and this last-named young man is in a festive mood. He wants to see the sights; to visit the theaters; and several times they go together, himself, his supposed sister and Mr. Jermyn. Rene does not join these parties; there is always a reason why she cannot, but she welcomes them all to her little parlor, and they come more than once.

Nearly always, after one of their pleasure excursions, Stanhope starts out for an hour or two, and then he goes straight to Jones' room, where he meets that worthy, or some other; once it is manager W—, with whom he converses for half an hour; and once it is Henry Weston, who has been looked up by Louis Jones, and who seems content for the time to remain in the city. Several times when Stanhope is abroad with Mr. and Mrs. Jermyn, they meet Weston in the crowd, at theater or concert, or on the promenade; but they do not recognize each other—do not appear to have seen each other, in fact. If Weston sees Stanhope, there is no sign in his face or bearing, but at every such meeting his eyes rest upon Mr. Jermyn, curiously, with something like interest or inquiry, or possibly both. Weston seems never to



be in haste on these occasions. If Mr. Jermyn and his party are entering a theater or concert-hall, he stands back, and watches the slim, graceful figure of Mr. Jermyn as it ascends the broad stairs. If they cross the pavement to their waiting carriage, he always has time to see Jermyn assist the lady and gracefully insist that Stanhope shall follow her, and then enter himself, turning his face toward the street as he closes the carriage door.

One evening, when they are at the theater, Manager W— sits for half an hour in the box opposite them, but he does not come conspicuously forward, and is not noticed by the attractive party of three, sitting in the light of the brilliant chandeliers, directly under his eye.

When they emerge from their box at the close of the entertainment, the manager stands aside, a little in the gloom, to let them pass, and they do not see or heed him, for Mrs. Jermyn, bright-eyed and animated, is talking gayly to Stanhope, her hand resting upon his arm, while her lord goes serenely on before.

Stanhope is every day at the Barings' now. They are on a very friendly footing, and seem to understand one another perfectly.

Rene has conceived a cordial liking for the clever young detective, and Baring rallies her a little on what he calls her "flame."

One morning, when Stanhope and Mrs. Jermyn have just left the bright little parlor, Baring says laughingly:

"My dear child, I have been trying to decide which is most truly and deeply devoted to our friend with the double title, you, or—Mrs. Jermyn; of course her devotion is accounted for—sisterly affection and all that—but I think Jermyn would not approve of the glances she gives him."

"Hush, dear!" replies Rene gravely; "that is not a topic for your jests."

"What isn't? your growing affection for our Stanhope?"

"No—*my* affection is honest enough; I mean *hers*."

"Her what?"

"Her affection—her daily increasing liking for him, Ken—can't you *see*? are you both blind? That woman, whether she is Ellen Jernyngham, Bertha Warham, or someone else, is fascinated by your friend. Think of it! she has taken him into her house, if it is her house, asked him to play a part to serve a purpose of her own; she has put herself upon the most familiar of footings with him; they are partners in an act of deception of which her husband is the object. That her motive may be a bad one, and his, evidently, is a good one, does not affect their relative positions. She does not love her husband, otherwise she never would have asked another man to assist in deceiving him. Not loving him, hating him perhaps, she has put herself in daily companionship with this fine, genial young man. Mark me, Ken! if that woman has wronged another, she will be punished in more than one way, and the punishment that she is unconsciously courting will be the bitterest."

"In two words then, you think that she has overreached herself, and fallen in love with Stanhope?"

"In two words, painfully plain words, I do."

"And what has led you to form that astounding opinion?"

"Is it astounding? I don't think so; almost any woman could fall in love with Mr. Stanhope—if she had nothing else to do."

"Well," cries the young husband catching her face between his two hands, "I am very glad that I have been able to furnish *you* with something else to do."

"So am I," she replied demurely. "It must be very painful to be too warmly attached to a man who follows

such a hazardous calling. Nevertheless, prepare yourself for the revelation, sir: I like our friend Mr. Stanhope very much."

A second week passes, and the program of the days is much the same.

If there is a change in any of the people gathering together for the final rehearsal of a great life-drama, it would seem to be in Richard Stanhope. He has grown restless, and sometimes Rene and Kenneth fancy that he is pale, a trifle haggard even, that he is rebelling against his part, and yet holding himself to it with a will of iron.

He comes and goes restlessly, and the face that smiles gayly in Mrs. Jermyn's drawing-room drops its mask in Rene's parlor and looks moody, and anxious, and dissatisfied. He is always busy when not under the Jermyn roof; letters and telegrams come and go, and every day his restlessness increases, and he commands himself, and plays his part, with greater effort.

"What is the matter with Stanhope?" Kenneth Baring says one morning to his clever little wife.

"I wonder if all men are so blind," she replies with that little mocking air that, secretly, he admires very much. But while she mocks, her face is serious.

"Ken., I began by being half sorry for *her*; I am *wholly* sorry for Stanhope, now."

"Rene do you mean—do you think that he has been bitten—that he—?"

"Now, Ken.! no, I don't mean that. I should not waste my pity on him if I thought so. No—he has guessed or in some way been convinced of the truth concerning her state of mind. He is too keen an observer not to have read the secret of her infatuation in her face. There are moments when it is pitifully plain. Mr. Stanhope is



not *quite* hardened, I suppose. The position would be unpleasant to *any* but the vainest of men."

"That's so—and he is not a vain man."

"No, he is a man to be proud of, not one to exalt, himself."

"Mrs. Baring," says her husband in affected terror, "I tremble for you!"

When the through train from Chicago comes thundering into the city station that night, two travelers, from among the many that arrived, attract the notice of a young man who is lounging carelessly near.

They are a man and a woman. He, sturdy of frame, with shrewd brown eyes and a strong face, but the eyes have lost their individuality behind a pair of spectacles, and the gray bushy hair, and grayer mustache give him the appearance of a staid and well-preserved elderly man.

The prim woman, who walks by his side, disdaining his awkwardly offered arm, seems all angles, no curves anywhere; she is sharp-eyed, sharp-featured; her gown hangs in sharp folds; her elbows are acute; but there is a firmness in the step, a dignity in the carriage of the head, and a look of fearless candor in the keen eyes.

The loungee watches them a moment and laughs softly, seeming to see an amusing incongruity in the two—then he comes forward and puts out his hand.

"Hallo, Carnes," he says brightly; "Miss Susan, glad to see you."

The man's face glows, the woman's eyes brighten, and her mouth relaxes in a smile.

"Everything is arranged," the young man says when they have shaken hands. "This way, Miss Susan," and without more ceremony he takes her arm and marches her away leaving the other to follow them, with a grin lurking under his big mustache.

## CHAPTER LXV

### NEMESIS

It is a fair morning, and Mrs. Jermyn and her fictitious brother come out into the sunshine and take their way toward the hotel to call upon Rene Baring. Mrs. Baring is indisposed, so Stanhope says, and this is why she does not go out. She has kept her room for several days—this is strictly true—and it will be a kindness perhaps, to make her an unceremonious morning call.

At first Mrs. Jermyn objects; she does not owe Mrs. Baring a call; they had better drive to the Park; but to this Stanhope objects; he has made an engagement with Baring; they will expect him—the Park can wait; he would like her company, would *prefer* to have her go with him, but of course—"

Of course he gains his point; she reconsiders her resolution not to call upon Mrs. Baring again, and yields gracefully to his proposal that they set out at once.

Mr. Jermyn is in his study; he is always in his study in the morning. He is engaged upon a learned scientific treatise, and is absorbed in his work.

Not so absorbed, however, that he does not see and appreciate the dainty toilet in which his wife presents herself at his door.

"You are going out, my dear?" he says, elevating his eyebrows slightly, and pushing back his chair.

"Yes, I am going to see the Barings. Carl insists upon it—would you care to accompany us?"

"Certainly not, at this hour; close the door, my dear."

She obeys him mechanically and then he says: "When are you going to send your brother away?"

"Really I—I have no idea," flushing slightly, "Perhaps you had better talk with him."

"I have told you that I would leave that to you. You wished me to, in fact."

"He does not speak of going. He seems quite content here."

"True he *does*. Nevertheless he must go soon."

"Do you want me to tell him to go?"

"By no means! I have another idea. You may tell him that we are going abroad, and offer him money, as much as you like, as delicately as you like. My work here," laying one white hand upon a heap of manuscript, "will be done within a week. There will be nothing to prevent our sailing then. Dispose of Mr. Jernyngham in any way you like. Only let it be understood between us, in a week we must be rid of him; within ten days we sail."

She is very white, and her eyes blaze; the hand that rests upon the handle of the door is clinched tightly.

"Will you be so good as to explain," she says in low cold tones, "why you have decided to travel so—soon?"

"It would be in better taste if you did not ask, but, yes, I will tell you. If we stay here any longer, if *he* stays here any longer, you will end by compromising yourself and me."

"Compromising myself? *How?*"

He brings himself and his chair back to the table, takes up his pen and dips it in the ink; he is as calm as a still lake.

"I believe that I cautioned you once. If you choose to entertain a bit of morbid sentimentality, I do not object, so long as you keep it out of sight. But you are *not* keeping it out of sight. You have let *me* see that



your sisterly regard for Jernyngham is getting beyond sisterly bounds; you may let *others* see it—Jernyngham is not a *fool*."

Her hand drops away from the door; she takes one step toward him; she is marble white.

"If anything could justify a woman in falling in love with any one—the butcher, the footman, *any* one—it would be to have lived in the same house with *you*—bloodless! an automaton!" she says fiercely.

He dips the pen again in the ink and fixes it in his hand.

"An automaton never does things that are in bad taste," he says; "never speaks hotly. Compose yourself, my dear; and go back to your brother; I suppose he is waiting; dismiss him in your own way, and, if you have any preparations to make, make them; we will spend the summer in France, and the winter in Italy." He bends his head over the manuscript and writes a line clean and straight across the top of the blank page uppermost; and she stands for a moment irresolute, sees him dip his pen again, and clinching her hand and biting her underlip, goes out softly, silently.

When she rejoins Stanhope, waiting in the drawing-room, she is calm again, but there is, about her, a glow of suppressed excitement, and she is more silent than usual.

Stanhope, on the other hand, is in great spirits; his face is animated, his speech quick and brilliant; it is not visible outwardly, but he has his sensation of suppressed excitement too.

Perhaps it is in the atmosphere, for when they are at last in Rene Baring's little parlor, the suppressed excitement is before them—it is manifest in Rene's glowing eyes and her frequently changing color, in Baring's quick speech, and increasing restlessness.

There is a third person present, and the prevalent sensation does not seem to have extended to him. He is the coolest one among them—a sturdy, tanned, good-looking personage, with an off hand-manner. He is introduced to Stanhope and his companion, by young Baring. Mrs. Jermyn does not quite catch the name, which sounds, she thinks, something like Carnes, and she does not ask, to be reassured; she does not feel at all interested in the stranger; she does not know—how should she?—that he is, for that occasion, and by special appointment, her chief inquisitor. She does not see either, the one swift significant glance that passes between Stanhope and this stranger; and of course the yet more significant hand-clasp is, to her, only a ceremony of greeting.

By and by, they are all seated in a social group near one of the windows, and the usual remarks that are the prelude to polite conversation have been made. Then Stanhope turns to the stranger. "Your name is familiar to me," he says, "that is through the newspapers. I don't suppose that you are the detective—the one who was—interested in that case of poisoning at New Orleans?"

The stranger hesitates a little, and seems somewhat embarrassed.

"Well," he says after a pause, "I don't suppose I had ought to deny my identity—here."

"No, indeed!" Baring breaks in. "We are all friends here. Yes, Jernyngham, he's that same officer—" Then turning again to the stranger, "Do you know I never heard the long and short of that case? Has the poisoner been found? Or is it a state secret as yet?"

The newly discovered detective seems to hesitate, and then says:

"Well, no it isn't a state secret, although it has not

yet been announced—in fact the fellow has not yet been arrested, but the train is laid, and he couldn't escape if one of you were to rush out and proclaim his danger from the house top."

They all are silent for a moment, then Baring says half to himself:

"It was a horrible thing."

"Was it?" asked Stanhope glibly. "Well, I wish you could tell us about it. I confess to an appetite for detectives' reminiscences. Would it be out of the way to ask for particulars?"

"Why, no, not if they will interest the ladies—of course; especially—as you know something about the affair already."

"It would interest me," says Rene, her face flushing hotly, "*very* much—and you, Mrs. Jermyn?"

"I have not even heard of a recent case of poisoning," Mrs. Jermyn replies indifferently. "Of course I shall like to listen—"But her tone is more indifferent than her words.

"Very well, then," says the narrator by request; and they all compose themselves to listen. The narrator sits opposite Mrs. Jermyn, and Stanhope is close beside her. Baring draws forward his chair, and his wife pushes hers a little into the background, and clasps her hands in her lap.

"The murder was committed at the close of the carnival season," began the narrator, looking over at Mrs. Jermyn, who, being directly opposite him, came naturally under his eye, "at the Hotel Victor, in New Orleans; or, rather, the body was found there. It was pretty clearly shown at the inquest that the poison had been administered before the dead woman was brought into the house. The body was found in the morning. It was that of a young and fine-looking woman, dressed in some rich car-



nival costum—everything about her indicated refinement, and delicacy. It was decided by the doctors that she had been a person in delicate health, probably some northerner come to New Orleans to recuperate. Poor thing! No one knew her; she had not a mourner, not a friend, to claim the body. The room in which she was found had been secured weeks before; everything indicated a skillful hand and a daring wit at the bottom of the mystery. The murder was a strange one; it proved upon examination, that the poor girl had been killed by the hypodermic syringe—a dose of morphine sufficient to kill had been injected into her arm. The house was crowded with guests, and it seemed at first as if no one could tell *how* the body came there, for, up to the night before, the room had not been occupied; then a trunk had been brought to the hotel by some expressman who said it belonged to the gentleman and lady who had taken the room. *They* were to come during the evening."

The story is old to all except Mrs. Jermyn, but she is listening intently, and more and more as he progresses, the narrator addresses himself to her.

"At the inquest a witness presented himself who gave some interesting and important evidence," he goes on. "He had been out all day with a gay party and coming in, about midnight, he saw a man going up the great stairway carrying a woman in his arms. He noticed that the man was well dressed, that he wore a light over coat and kept his hat well down over his eyes; that he stepped lightly and was firm and easy in his carriage. At the room where, the next morning, the dead woman was found, this man halted, pushed open the door with his foot, and entered; while the witness was wondering, the man came out again, and said that his wife had been frightened in the street and had fainted, and asked

the witness to go below and order up some ice-water. This he did, and went his way thinking no more about the matter. When he saw the body he was able to identify the cloak in which it had been wrapped, and the crimson drapery which she wore. The man who brought her there and who no doubt had administered the fatal dose had probably brought her in a carriage, rushed into the office when there was a crowd about the desk, demanded his key, and got it before the overworked night-clerk had found time to notice him, and carried the woman, who was then dead or dying, boldly up the grand staircase to the room."

Again he pauses; Mrs. Jermyn is leaning slightly forward, a look of strained expectancy in her eyes.

"The poisoner,"—she says eagerly—"was he found there?"

"No."

"And the woman—she was identified?"

"That's the singular part of the story; she was evidently a stranger in New Orleans; but almost at the last moment a detective, a friend of mine, made his appearance, and identified the body. It seems that, months before, a young girl had disappeared from her home, a long distance away from New Orleans, and detectives had been employed to search for her. At first it was thought that she had been killed by a jealous and disappointed lover, but afterward the officers became pretty thoroughly convinced that she had simply abandoned her home and her old father to seek her fortune. She was good-looking, clever, ambitious, and bold to recklessness. She was traced from city to city, and finally, there she lay, a stranger in a strange land, murdered, robbed, forsaken in death, by the man to whom she had confided her future. She had brought her old father to the verge of the grave, caused her father's wife

to meet with a violent, horrible death, driven a lover to murder and insanity, and brought, by her rash acts, disgrace and imprisonment to an innocent man—all this within less than a year—and there she lay, the victim of a blonde adventurer, an ex-convict, an assassin. Poor ambitious, deluded victim! The career she had longed for was ended; her fortune was a grave in Upton cemetery. There is her picture. Her name was Bertha Warham."

He has risen quickly; he is standing before her holding the picture before her wildly staring eyes. She has listened with a growing horror in her face; and now, as he utters these last words rapidly, like a denunciation, she staggers to her feet, lifts her quivering arms and haggard face toward the ceiling, and falls heavily forward, prone upon the floor, at his feet.

Her sin has found her out.



## CHAPTER LXVI

### FACE TO FACE WITH HER SIN

"Oh," sobs Rene Baring as they lift the senseless form and place it upon a sofa. "That was horrible."

"It was *right*, and it was true," replies Carnes, the narrator, as he turns from the sofa. "Baring, this is your part of the work." He crosses the room and joins Stanhope, who has not attempted to help them lift her, but has turned to the window instead, his back toward the others.

"Is that your opinion too, Dick?" he asks, placing a hand on the shoulder of the other, "do you think I painted it too black?"

"You couldn't paint it too black," says Stanhope gloomily, "It was the only way to deal with her. But it's an ugly piece of work for me. I wish to heaven it was over!"

"I understand you, Dick. It *is* a bad business, but you don't blame yourself, I hope?"

"I! good angels! No. If I thought for one moment that I had overstepped the bounds marked out for me, or in any way taken advantage of my position, I should hate myself—as it is—"

"Oh!" It is Baring speaking in an undertone. "I thought so; strong nerves hers; she'll be all right in a moment now." He rises from the floor where he has bent upon one knee to listen to the patient's almost imperceptible breathing, and steps back.

"That will do, Rene," he says, "let nature do the rest."

Rene's fan vibrates more slowly, and she gives the smelling bottle into her husband's hand; but she keeps her place near the head of the sofa. "Poor thing!" she says softly, "I pity her!"

"I don't!" says her husband, turning toward the two by the window, "she's been her own executioner. Shall I call *her* in now?"

Stanhope nods, and Baring goes to the door of the inner room, opens it and beckons to some one within.

"Now," he whispers, and a tall woman all angles and sharp lines, with a firm-set mouth, but with infinite pity in her gray eyes, comes forth.

It is Susan.

She takes the smelling bottle from the hand of the young physician and goes straight to the sofa.

"Firm," whispers Baring "Quiet," then he moves back, and Rene follows him to the window where the two detectives stand.

The patient stirs feebly, and Susan with a quick movement interposes herself between the sofa and the group at the window, then they are all quiet, silent.

Another movement from the patient—the head turns from side to side, then she utters a low moan, opens her eyes, and sees the figure beside her."

"*Susan!*"

What a cry it is! she clutches at the two firm unlovely hands, and clings to them convulsively.

"There, Bertha, child, you are better—hush!"

Her eyes close again, but she clings to the friendly hands. Then once more they flutter open, and suddenly she sits erect staring at Susan wildly.

"Drink this, Miss Warham," says a voice at her elbow, and she turns and sees Doctor Baring at her side, with a wine glass in his hand. "Drink this, Miss Warham," he repeats, "you need it. It is a cordial."

They are prepared for many things—for tears, for hysterics, for denials, for protestations, for bravado, for rage. They are not prepared for what comes; they do not quite know her yet—not even Stanhope, not Rene, clever student of her own sex though she is.

Twice, thrice, she has been addressed as Bertha Warham; and now, as she looks about her, she sees the group of three still by the window, and Susan standing beside her; she is suddenly, surprisingly calm.

She takes the glass from Baring with a steady hand and drains it to the last drop, and as she gives back the glass she says clearly, distinctly, looking him straight in the face:

"I am *not* Bertha Warham! I am,"—oh, how bitterly, with what self-loathing she speaks the name!—"I am *Mrs. E. Percy Jermyn.*"

"It is true then," says Carnes coming forward, "that she who was once Ellen Jernyngham is dead?"

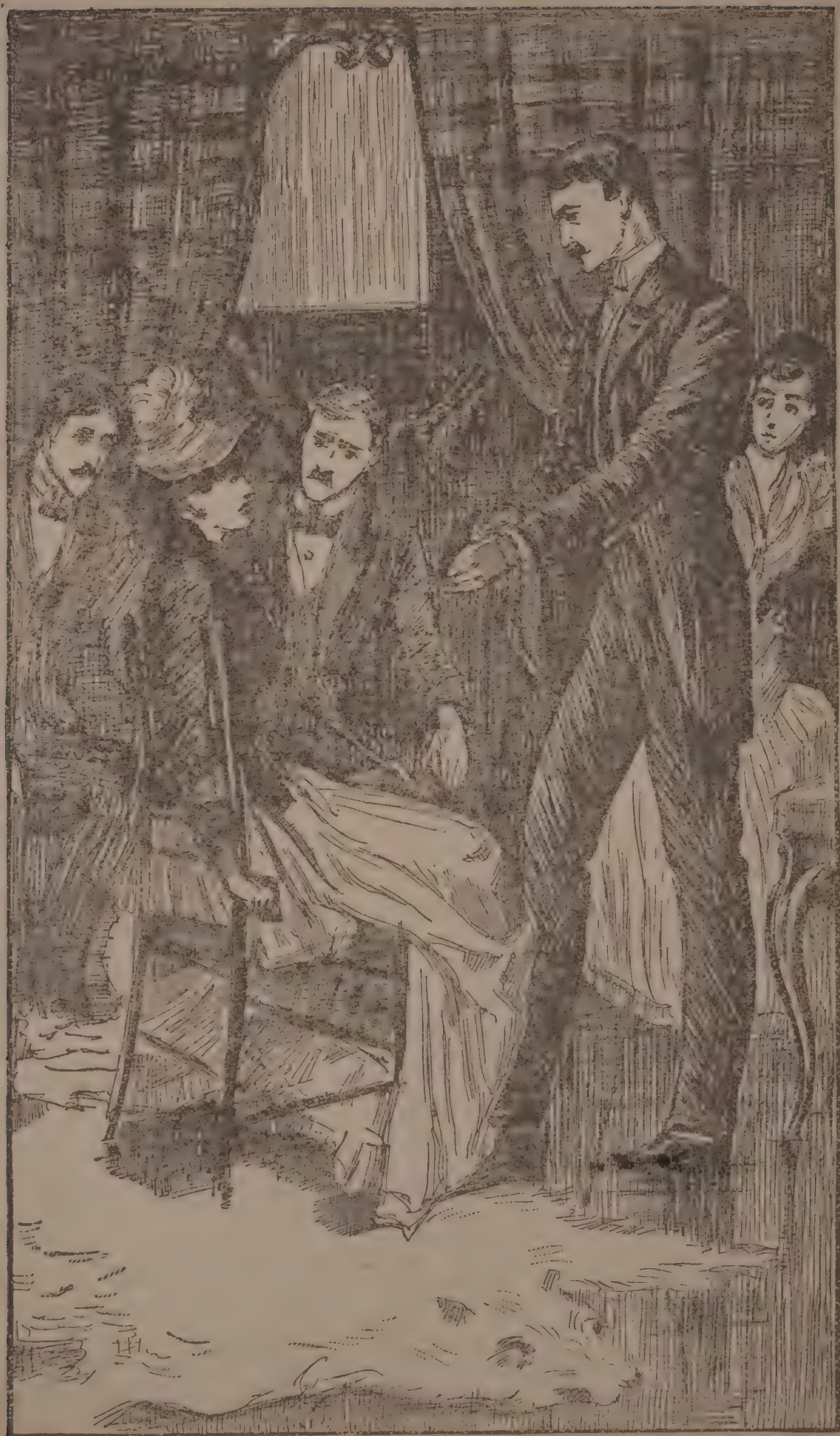
Then all that this man has said—all of his terrible story, word for word, sweeps back upon her memory; she turns toward him a look of unmistakable horror in her eyes.

"Tell me," she cries, "was it true? did you, did anyone bury a woman in Upton—a woman whom they called Bertha Warham? A woman who looked like—like that picture?"

With a quick stride Stanhope stands before her, stern-faced as Fate.

"I can best answer that," he says. "It was I who found that body in New Orleans; who identified it as that of Bertha Warham. It was I who took it to Upton and saw it buried by the side of John Warham's two wives; it *did* resemble that photograph, and it resembled *you* even more. It was *horribly* like you, as you look *now*. We might have continued to think it Bertha Warham,





"THERE IS HER PICTURE. HER NAME WAS BERTHA WARHAM."

—Slender Clue, p. 586.



but for a discovery, made at the last moment, by Doctor Baring here, and another medical man; the blonde hair of the dead woman, that was so like the hair of the real Bertha Warham, was only *died* blonde. The natural hair was *black* as black as *yours* is dyed at this moment. In your search for something more exciting than Upton and your father's house could give you, you have played a desperate game, and you have left a trail of blood and guilt and shame and sorrow all along your path. But your game is ended; so whether you are Bertha Warham or the wife of a poisoner matters little; you are *not* Ellen Jernyngham; you are an usurper! and unless you tell us all the truth—we already know enough to send the man you call your husband back to the prison from which he came, if not to the gallows—unless you make what reparation you can, you have nothing to expect from me, from any of us."

If she were doubly the sinner that she is, she is punished now. In all the days to come, no matter how dark they may be, she will never suffer again as at this moment, when, standing before her like a wrathful Fate, the man whom, in a few short weeks, she has grown to love, as, in her reckless ambitious life she never dreamed that she could love, denounces her, despises her, menaces her in the name of justice; pours into her eyes from his, the scorn he feels.

For a moment her face is convulsed, and her fingers writhe where they lie clasped together in her lap; then she rises and stretches out her hands toward him, and all the while her eyes look straight into his.

"I am guilty," she cries, "guilty of all that you say, and more. But not of *that*—not of Ellen Jernyngham's murder! I did not know it! I had no part in it! Oh, the liar! the assassin! Tell you all? am I not burning to tell you all? never fear that I shall keep anything



back. The one desire that I have left is to see him punished! Oh, the soft, slow serpent!"

Her hands drop loosely, she sways and falls again, this time to be caught by Stanhope, into whose face for the first time comes a ray of pity.

He lays her gently down and then recoils with a look of horror; for now, in her death-like swoon, she looks, even more than in life, like the dead woman of the Hotel Victor. They are so like that he feels a thrill of superstition as he gazes; and when Baring comes forward the superstitious thrill passes on to him. Something—a look that had not yet found its way into her face when she fell before the first shock—has overspread the pallid features now, and completed the ghastly resemblance.

"It is worse than seeing a ghost," Baring mutters across his shoulder to Stanhope.

And now the woman in Rene rises and compels them all to obey her.

"Go out," she says, "every one of you! Go anywhere! You shall not say another word to her until she has quite recovered. No, wait, Kenneth, do you help Miss Susan to bring her in and lay her on the bed.

When they have carried her to the inner room, and Rene has shut the door upon them, Stanhope passes his hand across his brow and says:

"I believe I *will* go out," and he goes, but Carnes and Baring go over to the window again and there they sit like sentinels.

## CHAPTER LXVII

### HER STORY

"It's the most singular thing I ever heard of," says Baring, after a long silence. "How two identities could be so completely changed! women, with no tie of blood, to explain their amazing resemblance! It's almost beyond belief!"

"Well, I don't know," says Carnes. "I suppose nature can't always go on turning out originalities, with always the same materials. Look at it! there must be every time, two eyes, two ears, nose, mouth, teeth, hair, two feet, two hands, and six-foot the limit for stature. One of these new creatures from old material comes into the world every minute, they say; always the same combination of eyes, nose, ears, teeth, etc.; and yet, when it happens, as it does occasionally, that nature repeats herself, we all say 'astounding! too strange for belief!' Bah! isn't it more astounding that out of five million mothers, all built after the same general plan, every child is able to pick out its own with perfect certainty? it even selects its grandmother with tolerable precision, and a married man, I am told, is always painfully sure of the identity of his mother-in-law; and yet the world is full of mothers-in-law, and popular report pictures them very much alike."

One of his sudden transitions has taken place, and Carnes, who was sufficiently, yes, painfully serious, only a few moments ago, is now as whimsical as relieved anxiety can make him.

"But really," says Baring, not able, so soon, to get away from the serious side of the case, "did you ever know of anything like this?"

"Well not *like* this. Not anything half so bad; but I have known a resemblance, almost as close as this, to cause considerable trouble. It happened nearly fifteen years ago and was among my youthful detective experiences. It was the case of a young lady who was greatly annoyed by being seen in places where she never had been; she was seen in town when she was in the country, and in the country when she was in town; one acquaintance met her at a party where she refused to recognize him. Several of her friends cut her completely because of supposed slights received on the streets, or at the theater, or some other public resort; finally the thing became serious; half a dozen more, too, having seen her in as many places of doubtful repute, and her lover became alarmed, angry, jealous; the more she denied having been seen here and there, where she knew she was not, the worse it made her case; finally she became desperate and determined to know the truth, and after considerable dodging, I succeeded in running down her double, a pretty bohemian, with no character to lose, who was as like her as a twin sister. To convince everybody, and silence all doubt, we brought the two together. I never saw such a resemblance; you will remember that I have never seen this Ellen Jernyngham of yours. But I have heard, from a London detective, a stranger story yet."

"Tell it."

"It happened ten years ago, perhaps longer. It was the case of a young man arrested for arson; he was said to have been one of a mob, a leader in fact, who fired some great country seat, owned by a too oppressive manufacturer. The outrage caused the death of a sick lady



who was driven from home into the wintry night. Nobody would believe that they could be mistaken in this man; he was identified by several witnesses; he had been closely seen by them, was, in fact, in the company of one or two for some time; they did not hesitate to testify against him all they knew how; his defense was an alibi; but they quashed that and had very nearly convicted him, when it came accidentally to the knowledge of his lawyer that he had a cousin several degrees removed who was his exact counterpart. They followed out this new clue, found the cousin in hiding, and he confessed his guilt."

"Well!" begins Baring again, then stops abruptly, for the door of the inner room opens and his wife is approaching.

"Ken.," she says, "she wants you to give her something tonic—something that will give her strength to tell her story calmly. I think it would better be a sedative. She's in a fever for fear one of you will go away before you have heard her. I think she means that she wants you to know something before you go near Mr. Jermyn."

"I'll give her a sedative," Baring says rising quickly, "we don't want any more fainting. Perhaps, Mr. Carnes, we had better call Stanhope back."

A few moments later and the door opens again and Bertha comes out, very pale and with eyes that seem burning, but quite calm, walking with almost her accustomed buoyancy. Stanhope rises as she advances, and pushes forward his own chair.

"Are you better?" he says more at a loss for words than she.

"Yes, I am better. Thank you," taking the proffered seat. "Better than I have been in weeks, in months. Better, and more at ease."

She looks it. As she sinks back in the easy-chair, she

is certainly more at ease than any of her auditors, unless it may be Carnes, who is certainly quite at *his* ease—the image, indeed, of ill-concealed satisfaction.

"If any of you know,"—she begins slowly, looking from one to the other until her eyes encounter those of Stanhope, looking away from him quickly, and letting her gaze rest finally upon Rene, who, with Susan, has followed her, and is now seating herself beside Baring—"if any of you know what it is to begin a course of deception, believing that it can harm no one and will gratify and benefit yourself; and if having once entered upon this course you have found that there is no going back, and that instead of controlling, as you had hoped and planned, you are yourself controlled, bound hand and foot, all your goings and comings ordered by a will of iron; and if, when you have begun to fit yourself into your niche, and be resigned, if not satisfied, you have found that your one first act must drive you on to others, on and on, until your days and nights, sleeping and waking are turned into one long lie, against which you rebel and are powerless—you will know the frame of mind I was in when he—"nodding toward Stanhope—"first came to me. But none of you *can* imagine this. You have not had my experience. I want to tell all my story now, that I may never have to tell it again, in full, in detail; I don't know what is in store for me. I don't know what you will require of me. I can never make reparation, for I cannot bring back the dead. And you have told me that one death, perhaps two, lies at my door.

"I shall not tell you all the thoughts, the vain longings, the day dreams, yes and the midnight visions, that prepared me for the career I have run. I suppose that I used to pass half my waking hours in dream-land. More and more I rebelled against my life at Upton, against the humdrum neighbors with their marrying and bury-

ing, and perpetual senseless gossip; against the country monotony; more than all against Joe Larsen, to whom, I hardly knew how, I had become engaged. I rebelled against him, and against my own folly, until at last I freed myself; but he always haunted me; he gave me no peace, and I began to fear him a little; it was to escape him, as much as to please my father, that I became engaged to Mr. March. At least he would take me away from the farm, I thought. I would have a home of my own and order it to my liking. Mr. March was wealthy, and he had sisters who were also wealthy; they lived in the city, and were much in society. I did not intend to devote myself to Mr. March and Upton. I meant to see a little city life with the help of his two sisters.

"Just before I accepted Mr. March, I had made a discovery by overhearing, it does not matter how, since I was not an intentional eavesdropper, an interview between my father and my step-mother. She was pleading the cause of Joe Larsen, and trying to persuade my father that I had treated Joe ill and that he ought to use his influence in Larsen's behalf. My father favored Mr. March, and told her so; she became very angry, and said so many uncomplimentary things about me, that at last, he turned upon her, and told her that he had no desire to marry me to *her illegitimate son*. He said that he had known her secret for a long time, and refused to tell how he learned it.

"From that day forward I was possessed of a loathing that I could not conceal nor control. I wanted to get away from them all—especially from Larsen and my step-mother. I accepted Mr. March and let them hasten the wedding preparations. Then Larsen began to besiege me with notes, to lie in wait for me when I walked or rode; to plead, to threaten, to rave. A



little more than a week before the day fixed upon for the wedding he sent me a letter, a horrible thing; a madman could not have penned a worse. It terrified me, and I sat down and instantly wrote an answer, telling him that I could not and would not listen to him; that I had discovered a secret—*his* secret, and Mrs. Warham's; that if nothing else had arisen between us, *that* was sufficient to make me withdraw from him, even on my wedding-day. It was not a gracious letter, and when I read it over it occurred to me that I was acting upon the supposition that he knew the truth concerning his parentage, as I knew it. Perhaps he did not know, and even I could not deal him such a blow as the revelation must be; so I tore up the letter and tried to think of another way out of my difficulties. In his letter, and in his interviews, he had threatened me, threatened Mr. March, threatened to take his own life. I felt that I must do something, and made an appointment with him. I need not describe that last interview—when it was over I knew that I must not marry Mr. March; Joe Larsen's rage and disappointment had carried him beyond my control; beyond his own. I did not fear for myself, I felt sure that he would not lift his hand against *me*; and I felt equally sure that Mr. March or himself would be the victim. *Then* I began to *hate* Joe Larsen—to hate him actively with a burning desire to hurt him.

"And then—at the very moment when that hate was seething hottest, when all the hatefulness and horror of my position was strong upon me, before I had found time for so much as a moment's reflection or calmness, —*then* satan came to my aid."

She paused and glanced at Stanhope a moment, then withdrawing her gaze, she went on.

"I had met Larsen, at his request, at a certain rock,

upon the river and at the edge of a dense wood; it was a place familiar to us both, and a very good place for such a meeting, or—for an evil deed. Larsen was thought to be absent from Upton, and he did not wish his presence in the neighborhood known; at least that was the reason he gave for asking me to meet him at the rock. I thought then, and think now, that he believed that alone with him there he could intimidate me; but I never feared him less, and it suited me to go. When he left me, raging like a madman, I did not leave the rock at once. My horse was tethered in the wood out of sight, and I sat down upon the moss to think. I wanted to be alone.

"*Then* my evil genius—*Satan* in the form of man, appeared as if conjured by my own evil passion. *Then* for the first time, I saw 'E. Percy Jermyn.'"

She uttered the name as if it scorched upon her tongue, and paused again; when she resumed, it was in a more hurried tone, and with drooping head.

"I did not know him. I had never known one of his kind—I mean a man of the world, well-dressed, cultured, outwardly such a gentle-spoken, fine gentleman. He had been a witness to my interview with Joe Larsen. He had listened, he said, because he dared not leave me alone with such a ruffian, and had feared that by presenting himself, he might only make my position worse—more dangerous. You know the man, and I need not tell you how plausible he was; how respectful, how sympathetic; how delicately he offered his aid and placed himself at my disposal! Already, even before I came out to meet Joe Larsen, I had more than half determined to leave it all—my father, my two lovers, Upton—everything. All my life I had been a dreamer, and had visions of what I might do out in the world, seeking for fame and fortune. Oh! how foolish this

sounds to you!—yes, and to *me, now*—but I was romantic, vain, ambitious, and I had been taught to believe myself a beauty.”

She uttered this last in self-scorn that was born of the bitterness of her heart, and then suddenly lifted her head.

“One thing, you *must* believe,” she said almost fiercely, “even though it shows me at the worst. Neither then, nor after, did I for one moment feel the smallest regard for the man I married; with all his blonde perfection, his dainty manners, and seeming chivalry, he was, to me, from the first, only a means to an end. No,” seeing the look of horrified surprise upon Rene Baring’s fair face, and the slight drawing back of her figure, “no! it only shows the extent of my depravity; I can not even plead my love for that man as the excuse for my folly, my evil deeds. The temptations that find so many weak were not temptations for me; I laughed at them. It was my restless spirit, my love of adventure that urged me on from recklessness to sin. That man offered his help, he showed me a way of escape, and I accepted his aid.

“When we parted that day at Death Rock, I congratulated myself upon my exceeding cleverness. I had accepted his offer of help with a great show of innocent frankness; but I had *not* been frank. I had not even told him my name nor where I lived. I had fancied, fool that I was, that so chivalric and respectful a gentleman might have *scruples* against helping me to run away from an old and widowed father; so I told him that my name was Marion Burton, that I was the ward of an unkind guardian who meant to force me into a hateful marriage; it was a poor, hackneyed tale; but he affected to believe it, and for a long time I thought he did.



"I ended my brilliant story by a still more brilliant admission. I told him that I had a little sum of money of my own, and he gave me much good advice about caring for it;" she stopped for a moment, and just in time to catch a word or two whispered by Rene in her husband's ear; she turned toward her quickly and said with a bitter little half-laugh: "You wonder if he cared for *me*," she said. "I will *tell* you how much he cared, as we go on. At first," and here her lip curled again, "he was so distantly respectful, and so thoughtfully kind, without a hint of flattery in word or manner. I thought he simply meant to be kind, and for two long weeks, idiot that I was, I believed him to be just a city exquisite, out rustivating, very kind-hearted, and wonderfully simple, and frank. I fancied, in my presumption, that I had found a tool just ready for my hand. And I meant to make him serve me as such.

"But later, when we had met a few times—for we only met three times at Death Rock—I found him looking at me so strangely, so intently that I began to flatter myself that I had made an impression, and asked him why he gazed at me so intently.

"His reply, I remember well; and how I doubted it, inwardly of course, and was secretly flattered, by what I thought was his mode of manifesting his admiration. I was quite well accustomed to flattery, and took admiration as my due—his reply was that I reminded him *very much* of a lady whom he knew well, a dear friend in fact—so much a friend that it was for *her* sake, quite as well as my own, that he offered me his assistance. I doubted this then. Later I learned how hideously distorted a truth he had uttered." She paused again and sighed; then looking once more toward Stanhope resumed.

"Well, I hate to dwell upon this. What did Joe Lar-

sen tell you of my flight, sir?" She addressed herself to Stanhope, who promptly answered:

"That you fled with him, and left him after reaching the city."

"That was true," she said. "I left him but I also left Mr. Jermyn. In fact I saw him only once while in Chicago; he had aided me by finding me a safe hiding-place in the city, where I remained a week, and then set out for New York in the dress of a boy. I was strange to cities, but Mr. Jermyn had coached me well. I carried a large valise, remained as quiet and inconspicuous as possible in my sleeping car, and just as we ran into the city at early morning I emerged from my compartment in my own clothes, finished my woman's toilet in the dressing-room and arrived here, Marion Burton once more. It was a daring venture, but it was a safe one. So far I had followed the program as Mr. Jermyn laid it out for me. But I had not confided in him fully, and did not mean to; still I waited his coming, which was not immediate. The cause of his delay was not known to me then. I understand it now. But I meant to wait quietly until he came. I was not yet ready to face the big city quite alone. At the right time I meant to leave him as I had left Larsen."

"Allow me," broke in Carnes at this point, "let us return to Larsen for a moment; after that interview at the Rock, did you not meet again? I have a reason for wishing to know more of Larsen's movements. Will you enlighten me? Begin, please, where you left him or he you, at Death Rock."

"I will," she said, and after a moment went on.

"That night after parting from Mr. Jermyn—who by the way had told me to call him Mr. Percy—I saw Joe Larsen again after having formed my plans. I had promised to meet him again, and I now told him what I had determined to do.

"He had been in hiding for some days, only coming out to meet me, and I naturally conjectured that he was plotting some new mischief. I told him he must still keep out of sight, for it was no part of my plan to let the Uptonites believe that I had eloped with Joe Larsen. I wanted my disappearance to be as much of a mystery as possible—another of my charming, romantic ideas—Joe remained concealed as I bade him and on my wedding eve was in the garden at midnight.

"He put a ladder up to my window and he had a horse and light buggy in waiting near. We went across the country to a little railway station where the trains were only stopped by an occasional flag by day, or a lantern at night. And no one saw us set out. I had made my terms with Joe, and he had promised to go back to Upton to throw people off the scent. I, of course, was to wait in Chicago and he was to remain in Upton a week to avert suspicion. He had rebelled against this, but I was firm—it must be thus or not at all, I told him; and thinking himself sure of me, he obeyed. If he had dreamed that I knew a living soul in the city, he would never have left me for one moment. He left, as it was, reluctantly enough, but he *went*. I have never seen him since. On the day that he left Upton at the end of his week of probation, I was on my way east, and if we had met on the street he would not have recognized me."

She turned toward Carnes. "Is there anything more?" she asked with a touch of haughtiness, which left her face at once when Stanhope's voice interposed:

"Are you not weary? Rest and then let us return to Mr. Jermyn.

"I am not tired," she said, "and I want to have done with this."

"I think I have said that I went at once to a little hotel which Mr. Jermyn had recommended to me as safe



and respectable and not too public; a family hotel in fact. Soon I began to study the town— to go out as much as I dared, to read the papers, and to feel less lost and less little and alone in such a great city. By the time Mr. Jermyn arrived in New York I was quite at home, and beginning to feel adventurous. At first he only called quite formally, just to look after my comfort, he said; and this suited me very well. He was very busy, he told me, but after a time would be more at my disposal. I laughed 'in my sleeve,' for I had decided that he had outgrown his usefulness. One evening he made me a short call. The next day I left the hotel and took rooms in a boarding-house; and now I was ready to begin my career. I had money enough for present needs; I was free and in New York, the city of my ambitious dreams. I resolved to try my fortune.

"I wanted to go upon the stage—what romantic girl with a pretty face does not? and I set about trying to find an opening for my talents; so two weeks passed and I had almost forgotten Mr. Jermyn when one evening, just at dusk, as I was walking leisurely toward my boarding place, down a quiet street, a long way from the place where he had left me, a voice at my side said 'Good evening, Miss Burton,' and I turned to face Mr. Jermyn.

"You *can't* care to hear in detail all that followed. He seemed only amused at my unceremonious flitting; he was more plausible than ever, and just as respectful. I had misunderstood him; he assured me; he had no desire to impose his presence upon me, he only wished to serve me; *would* I give him my address? and then, if I chose, he would not seek me. He would just be at my service if I *needed* him.

"Of course we met again and yet again, and he told me with great show of frankness that his true name was E. P. Jermyn, and he had just made his home in the city.

"After a time I began to look for his visits, which, still, were neither long nor frequent; I did not find the city so gay as I had expected. And I soon realized *why*. Then Mr. Jermyn began very carefully to inquire into my past, my history. He had 'a reason,' he said, a very sufficient one—the same in fact which had impelled him to follow me when I shunned him, and to serve me in the beginning.

"Of course my curiosity was aroused by this, and I asked to hear the reason.

"Now I must admit that I had begun to feel greater confidence in the man; he seemed so entirely disinterested; he began to be so useful to me.

'After much seeming hesitation he said that he would exchange confidences. He would tell his story first, and then, if I saw any reason in it for trusting him, he felt sure I would do so.

"Then he told his story, told it with so much sadness, so much charity, expressed in every sentence!

"What a gentle, much enduring, generous philanthropist he seemed! How deprecatingly he spoke of himself, and yet how he contrived to make clear to me the points to which he *seemed* scarcely conscious of alluding.

"This was his story: He was married, and it was his wife whom I so closely resembled; she was beautiful, gifted, proud. He was devoted to her; but her pride had caused him some unhappiness. She was in fact the daughter of a father who had married a second wife, and whose family had separated when the children of both wives were young. The father dying, his wife with her two children, a girl and a boy, had gone west, where all her friends had gone before her. The eldest daughter, who had inherited a small fortune from her mother, went to live with her mother's friends. It was this eldest daughter, Mr. Jermyn said, who was his wife.

"Her father's affairs were left by the second wife in an unsettled state, and when, two or three years after his death, everything was arranged, and there was a modest little fortune to be divided among the heirs, there were none to be found, except Mrs. Jermyn. Here he was forced to mention again 'with deep regret' that his wife was a very proud woman. "Her mother belonged to an old family, or what in America was considered an old family. At this point he let me see quite clearly that *he* did not share in the belief in American class distinction, he being of English descent; but he looked indulgently upon her prejudices.

"One thing, however, had pained him exceedingly: his wife had taken only a lukewarm interest in the search after her half-brother and sister—had seemed almost glad, relieved, when the search failed. Not that she coveted their share of her father's fortune; he was sure that could not be the reason; it was, rather, that pride of hers, that made her a little unnatural. The step-mother had not been a very refined woman, and her family was decidedly vulgar; when they parted, the boy had been a wild fellow, in a fair way to bring the family to disgrace; and the girl was hot-headed and hoydenish. He thought Mrs. Jermyn would have felt more kindly toward the girl if there had not been so close a resemblance between them. However, they had never been heard from, and he, Mr. Jermyn, had always felt dissatisfied. He had an ample fortune, and would gladly serve those children, of course they were grown to be a young man and young woman now, provided for and in a pleasant home.

"And this was why he had been so interested in *me*. I was the image of his wife; might I not be that lost half-sister? would I not trust him, and tell him all my story.

"Ah! How clever I thought myself when I evaded,



prevaricated, made myself a mystery; told him that I was only Marion Burton—that I had no story to tell—that even if I were that vulgar half-sister I would never intrude myself upon his wife, never ask for her help or her countenance.

"Then how he argued and reasoned, and begged me not to turn away from him, to let him be my friend; how he praised what he called my spirited behavior, and flattered me so delicately that I began to think myself a very important and misunderstood young person. And how he must have laughed inwardly all the time! what a comedy it must have been to him, to see me so coolly appropriating by implication, if not openly, the identity of a girl who never existed!

"His last effort was more pathetic than all the rest. His wife was in failing health; the doctors said she must travel; what a companion I might be to her! How we might learn to love each other! would I not reconsider and tell him all?

"But I was resolved to keep up the mystery. I would promise nothing, except that I would not go on the stage, or go away, without first seeing him, and that I would see him again soon. That was the beginning.

"I carried away from that interview two impressions: the first, that Mrs. Jermyn was a handsome, haughty, cold, selfish aristocrat; the second, Mr. Jermyn was a soft-hearted, fine-looking, fine-mannered philanthropist, who believed in *me*, and admired me somewhat. You see how well he had paved the way for what was to follow. I had quite lost my distrust of him.

"After that we met often, and he was always the same—interested, friendly, almost affectionate at times, but always so respectful, so deferential. He had gauged my vanity and knew how to play upon it.

"After a time he let me know that he was of noble

lineage. He told me bits of his history, and I began to regard him with more interest. He was the son of an English baronet—there was only one life, that of an elder brother in poor health, between himself and the title.

"His wife was looking forward too eagerly, he said, to the time when *he* might be E. Percy Jermyn, Baronet. This was his second bait.

"All the time he was acting upon the assumption that I *was* the missing sister, although I never said, in words, that I was, or was not, and the subject was tabooed between us. I had insisted that it should be, with great display of dignity.

"One day he came to me with a sorrowful face.

"‘My dear child,’ he said, ‘I wish you would listen to me: Ellen is failing in health daily—her physicians say that it may end at any time in quick consumption, and I fear that they are right. Added to this I have just heard from my brother; he is losing ground fast; he begs me to come home soon. He thinks that his life is now only a question of months. In a few weeks I shall take Ellen away, south and west, until she is stronger, then we will sail for Europe. I *wish* you would go with us; would it be so very disagreeable to be the sister of Sir Percy Jermyn, to live in London and be a society belle? In a little while I may be left alone with only my wealth and an empty title. Then I shall want you for my companion; who but my wife’s sister would naturally take her place as mistress of Jermyn Hall? Think it over.’

"I did think it over, and I decided; before I went to Mrs. Jermyn’s house, he took me, disguised in order to conceal my startling likeness to his wife—he feared it would shock her at first, he said—to the office of her physician; he wanted me to hear *his* verdict—to understand the worst.

The physician's verdict was soon given: He regretted to say that Mrs. Jermyn's health could never be restored. He doubted if she could outlive the summer. She was looking a little better just at present, but it was not a healthy condition—only a temporary rally.

"He had planned it all, but he managed to make me think it was almost my own idea. I was to disguise myself to the extent of a wig and eyeglasses, and be introduced into his house as his amanuensis; I could thus see and judge Mrs. Jermyn, and decide whether I would like to travel with her, and be her sister, or not. I did not see much use of this, for I had already decided; but he arranged it, and carried his point in every particular.

"Well—I went with him from the doctor's office to his house, and we met Mrs. Jermyn quite unexpectedly at the very entrance.

"I do not care to dwell upon that meeting, nor upon what followed. Mrs. Jermyn is dead; and from the very first I may have wronged her. When her husband named me to her, I thought for one moment that she meant to *strike* me; then she gathered her draperies away from any possible contact with mine, and giving me such a look as one might cast at a thing despised and despicable, she swept past me and out of the house.

"It was done—what Mr. Jermyn alone might not have prevailed upon me to do, his wife *drove* me to, with *one look*. From that moment I hated her.

"The rest came about gradually; when Mr. Jermyn and his wife left home to travel southward we understood each other; when they had been gone a week I also went south; I went to Charleston. Just before the opening of the carnival, I went to New Orleans.

"I had hardened myself to my part; had almost persuaded myself that the thing I was meditating was not a great wrong; that it would harm no one. I arrived in



good spirits, and he met me and drove with me to a hotel, a small but comfortable place, where I stayed quietly all through the carnival season, up to the last day.

"He did not name his wife, nor did I ask after her. It was not necessary. And I did not see him again until the morning after *Mardi gras*. Then he sent me a message, which I understood, and I packed my trunk and sent it to the steamboat landing. He met me there, and we went on board a northward bound steamer.

"Then he told me very gently that his wife was dead; that she had been dead four weeks; and now there was only one thing to be done. He had sent, months before, a picture of his dead wife, to his friends in England, and they knew all about her family, and her fortune; they were prepared, and anxious to welcome her to Jermyn.

"Why need they ever be told that he had made a second marriage? every thing was so well arranged for a welcome over there, and so many explanations were needed. His wife's will left him her sole heir; had he not a right to give me his wife's fortune, and his wife's name if he chose? Thus my story, my past, whatever it was, might remain my own secret; there would be nothing to explain to the English baronet, and, for himself, he did not care about my past; we would bury it utterly.

"How easy it all seemed. I had only to turn my blonde locks black, and allow him to call me Ellen.

"We stopped at Memphis, took a carriage, and drove inland to a little town, where we were married; then back again, and up the river, back to New York. I had not seen the newspapers; if I had, and had read how that dead woman was mistaken for me I should have

understood it all. And now you will see, Mr. Stanhope, why it was so easy to make me believe in your Carl Jernyngham. I thought that the missing brother had appeared at last, and I *was* honestly, anxiously determined to help him.

"Ellen Jernyngham kept a journal, always I think; at least he had in his possession several volumes covering a number of years; they were daily records, minute and full of detail. He gave them into my hands without hesitation. He said I could learn my part and be perfect in it by studying these; and when I asked him who had torn out the leaves containing the latest records, he laughed and said that they would not have given me much light. I knew then that *he* had removed them; doubtless what they contained was not creditable to him. I learned from these journals that there really was a half-brother, but there was no mention of a sister, and when I demanded an explanation of him, he smiled that slow smile of his, and said that 'all women were sisters, more or less.'

"Through these journals, I was able to play my part without blundering; and where they lacked, his memory supplied the deficiency; but I did not dare to imitate her handwriting, although I was practicing faithfully, in order to become—a forger—on the dead. Gentlemen, have I omitted anything? Is there anything more to explain?"

In the long pause that follows her question, she speaks again:

"I have not tried to give you an idea of what my life has been with this man. It would be useless; he is a man of steel, masked in smiles and soft blonde flesh. He never argues, never explains, never lifts his voice in anger; but he *rules*, and he brooks ~~no~~ opposition. From the day when I married him, I have had no visible, ex-

pressed will, no identity of my own. I soon saw the folly of striving against him, and tried to meet him on his own ground. I am not going to ask for mercy at your hands. I don't want you to spare me. But one thing I do ask; Let me go back to that house, where I have been mistress only in name; let me stand before him and tell him that I *know* how Ellen Jernyngham died. I want to see his face. I want to know if *anything* will move him! I want to stand by when you pull the mask from his face. I want to show him that I can jibe with a smile, and be relentless in soft accents, too. I want him to see how apt a pupil he has had. And I want you to tell me *first* all that you know of his past career. Humor me in this, and I will obey you in all else—in *anything*."



## CHAPTER LXVIII

### HER PUNISHMENT

"There are two or three points," said Stanhope, "which we may as well clear up now. They are of minor importance, but I think we will do well to talk them over — briefly."

He had been telling Bertha Warham what she had wished to know concerning the career of the man she had taken for her husband, that she might enjoy the wealth and usurp the position of the woman who had insulted her.

They were alone in Rene Baring's little parlor, the others having withdrawn, Rene out of womanly delicacy, the men because they already knew quite enough of E. Percy Jermyn.

She lifted her face with a look that was half-reserve and half timidity.

"There is nothing I wish to conceal," she said.

"When I came here in search of you," said Stanhope, "I traced you, through your picture, to the theater where you had made an engagement and were expected to come to take your part in a new spectacle.

"One evening you called upon the manager and arranged to come next morning to rehearsal. I was there on time, but *you* never came; you left your boarding place immediately after your last visit to the theater. Did you know that you were being followed?"

She shook her head; "No," she said, "I had made myself very disagreeable, after that encounter with Mrs.

Ellen Jermyn, and had gone to manager W—and applied for the place in spite of *his* remonstrance. I was in an uncertain state of mind that night whether to break away from the Jermyn influence and go upon the stage, or accept the future which he had laid before me, and that night I was to decide. I had thought all day, and my better angel seemed to prevail. I went to the manager in good faith—but again my wicked pride held me back from the safer course. Manager W—had been very polite and kindly at our first interview. He was kind at that, and polite too, but there was a something in his manner when I entered his presence, a look in his eye, an air of—I can't express it. Plainly put, he had received me *before* as a gentleman receives a lady; this time *he did not*. The change was not in his speech, but in look and manner. My pride was touched; I had heard and read of the scant courtesy sometimes shown to those in lesser places in the great theaters. I left his office in a most unpleasant frame of mind. In going downstairs I saw, in one of the great mirrors along the wall, the image of Manager W—following me stealthily downstairs. I took a cab at the door, and half-way home exchanged it for another. I reached my rooms in a rage, packed in haste, wrote a note to Mr. Jermyn telling him that I had decided in his favor—and turned my back upon the theater."

"I comprehend," said the detective. "Manager W—had heard my story. You appeared to him in a new light and he let this be seen in his manner. It was unfair, unmanly. Perhaps, too, you were oversensitive."

"I expected too much, no doubt," she said bitterly. "Is there anything else, Mr. Stanhope?"

'One thing—why did you ask me to personate Carl Jernyngham?'

She put her two hands up to her head.

"Oh!" she said, "do you not understand *that*? I had begun to feel unsafe and—I wanted, honestly wanted to help that unfortunate man. I meant, if all had gone as I wished, to escape from Mr. Jermyn with your assistance."

"Had the man given you reason to fear him?"

Again she put her hand to her brow, "Surely." she said, "I have omitted something! Did I not speak of Ellen Jernyngham's will?"

"I think not—definitely—"

"It was because of that. He had told me that she had left him everything, and fool that I was, I married him thinking that, little as I cared for him, he must have some regard for me. Why else should he wish me to be his wife? I soon learned the truth. Ellen Jernyngham had held her own purse strings, and she had left a will with some New York lawyer. It left everything to Carl Jernyngham—everything but five thousand dollars. To announce the death of his wife would deprive him of a fortune. Do you see it now? with me in Ellen Jernyngham's place, her fortune was not lost to him. Do you realize what I am confessing to you? I am a forger—a forger upon the dead. I have drawn her money in person, signing the checks with gloved hand in order to be more secure in my imitation. What shall you do with me?"

Nothing, if you do all in your power to make restitution now; if you will go back to Upton with honest Susan and make your old father's last days less lonely."

"I will do whatever you wish."

"What has been done with that will?"

"There were two copies made—she must have doubted and feared him too. He wanted to destroy the will and I at first opposed him; then, when I found that there was a duplicate, I let him burn the copy."



"Did he ask you to sign another?"

"Ah! I see that you understand. He wished me to sign another—in his favor—I—refused."

"Ah ha!" he ejaculated. "I can see why you feared for yourself."

For a moment there was silence between them, then she said:

"In all that I have told you, do not think that I have been trying to lighten my own load, to make my punishment less. God knows I have been guilty enough. I have forsaken my father, deceived an honest man who wished to make me his wife; listened to the proposals of a man whom I did not love, and only half-trusted at the best, while yet his wife was living, usurped her place, name and fortune when dead, and all this to gratify a wicked vanity, an ignoble ambition. I was not slow in learning that the man I had married was heartless and without principle. But a murderer—I never dreamed of that, so help me heaven!"

There was a long pause, and she arose and moved a step nearer him. "Do you believe me?" she said in a tremulous half-whisper.

For a moment his eyes met hers, searching them steadily, then: "I do," he said, and held out his hand.

"Thank you," she withdrew her hand quickly and moved away a little. "I want to ask a favor," she added.

"What is it?"

"Carl Jernyngham. You will see him soon?"

"There is no time to lose."

"I would like to put the will—his sister's papers into his own hand. I want to tell him the truth."

"You are trying to be hard upon yourself," he said.

"It is the simplest way—I want to do it."

"You shall, then. But reflect; your trial will be hard enough at best. Your—Jermyn will certainly be brought to trial—you will have to appear against him."



"LOVE HAS PASSED ME BY."—Slender Clue, p. 613.





"I have not flinched at the evil; I will not flinch now. One thing more—you will let me be the first to confront Percy Jermyn?"

"Yes, we have already arranged it so;"—he moved a pace toward the door—"we will lunch here," he said, turning back, "and will leave in an hour, if you are strong enough for more excitement."

"I am strong enough; go on."

"We dare not lose time in securing that man. The house of course is closely watched. We will go back as we came, you and I—the others will follow, and now," he put his hand upon the door handle, "I will send you Susan?"

"Mr. Stanhope,"—she made a forward movement, then stopped in the middle of the room, "I cannot thank you, and I cannot blame you. You have done right, and you have spared me where you could. I will not speak of repentance, to you, or to anyone. Whether I am a woman repentant, or simply a woman baffled, time—the future—must show."

He bowed silently, went out, and softly closed the door.

For a moment she stood as he had left her, and her gaze seemed still to be following him.

Then she clinched her hands and lifted them thus to her pallid face.

"Oh!" she uttered through shut teeth as she turned away. "Let the future bring what it will, I shall never be punished, I shall never suffer more, than at this moment. I have lost all—and love—love has passed me by!"

## CHAPTER LXIX

### UNMASKED

It is high noon when E. Percy Jermyn finishes a magnificent paragraph with a graceful sweep of the pen, and pushes back his chair from the study-table.

He glances at his watch and smiles a smile of satisfaction; his excellent scientific treatise is progressing rapidly—it is nearly done. He gets up, yawns, and goes to the window that overlooks the street. Two policemen are passing, walking slowly, intent, it would seem, upon seeing how slow they could be. Oh! and Mrs. Jermyn's carriage is drawing up at the door; prompt to the lunch-con-hour, he thinks, for Mr. Jermyn mortally dislikes to sit at table alone.

Yes, she is getting out, and Jernyngham is with her; he presses his lips together, and turns from the window, just a second too soon to see that another person is alighting from the carriage.

He goes back to the writing-table and busies himself for a moment, putting the heaped-up manuscript into an orderly pile, crossing the pens upon the rack, putting the stopper into the mouth of the inkstand, toying with the paper-weights.

As he turns from the table, the door opens, and Mrs. Jermyn is again before him. Her cheeks are aflame, her eyes glowing, her lips parted, her manner that of one who comes with a fixed purpose, but save for the unwonted fire in her face, she shows no sign of emotion, she is as calm as he. As the door swings shut behind

her, she advances, until only the width of the table is between them.

"I have heard something startling this morning," she says in a voice not at all like that of a startled woman. "It came up in the course of conversation; we were talking about New Orleans."

"Ah?" says Mr. Jermyn with polite interest.

"And the Mardi gras!"

"Interesting subject, very."

"It appears that Mr. Baring was in New Orleans during the late carnival, and he chanced to be called upon to assist at an examination at the Hotel Victor. It was a poisoning affair. I was interested in the case because the victim was identified as one Bertha Warham who ran away from her home months before."

"Really! I am interested."

'Perhaps it will increase your interest to know that the dead woman was *not* Bertha Warham, although she is lying now in the Warham burying-place, with 'Bertha Warham' upon her coffin-plate. She was a poor murdered wife, who unfortunately *resembled* Bertha Warham too closely."

She is conscious of a change in his face—it is not fear, it is not anger, she cannot define it; she only knows that his face is changing, and she feels her first thrill of triumph—at last she has power to move him.

"The name of this murdered wife," she goes on distinctly, "was Ellen Jernyngham Jermyn. They did not tell me this. It was not necessary. Oh, you are the only man in the *world* who could have done such a deed! to kill her and let them bury her in my grave!"

"Was it your grave?"

There is a change in his voice too, but that, like the other, is indescribable.

"It was the grave of Bertha Warham, and, before I



became—bah! before I became the wife of an assassin, I was Bertha Warham."

"Yes? I have suspected as much. Do you find it unpleasant to be—the wife of an 'assassin?' You know how I hate vulgar, common epithets, Mrs. Jermyn. Do you mean to tell me that you have been as blind as you would have me believe?—you—clever as you undeniably are?"

"Clever? yes, I *have* been clever! Do you know what I am going to do, poisoner? I am going to open these doors, and call in the police, and say to them, that man is a murderer—arrest him."

The man actually laughs.

"If you do," he says, "I shall say, 'gentlemen, my poor wife is out of her senses; she has been insane at intervals for months. I will show you the physician's certificate to that effect. She has been quite gentle until recently. But I have known that I must be prepared for a change, so as you are here, gentlemen, I will ask you to assist me; we will take her to the hospital,' and then I will show them the certificate which I brought from New Orleans."

It is her turn now, and she laughs, scornfully, bitterly.

"Try it," she says and in an instant she is at the door.

"Gentlemen, enter!"

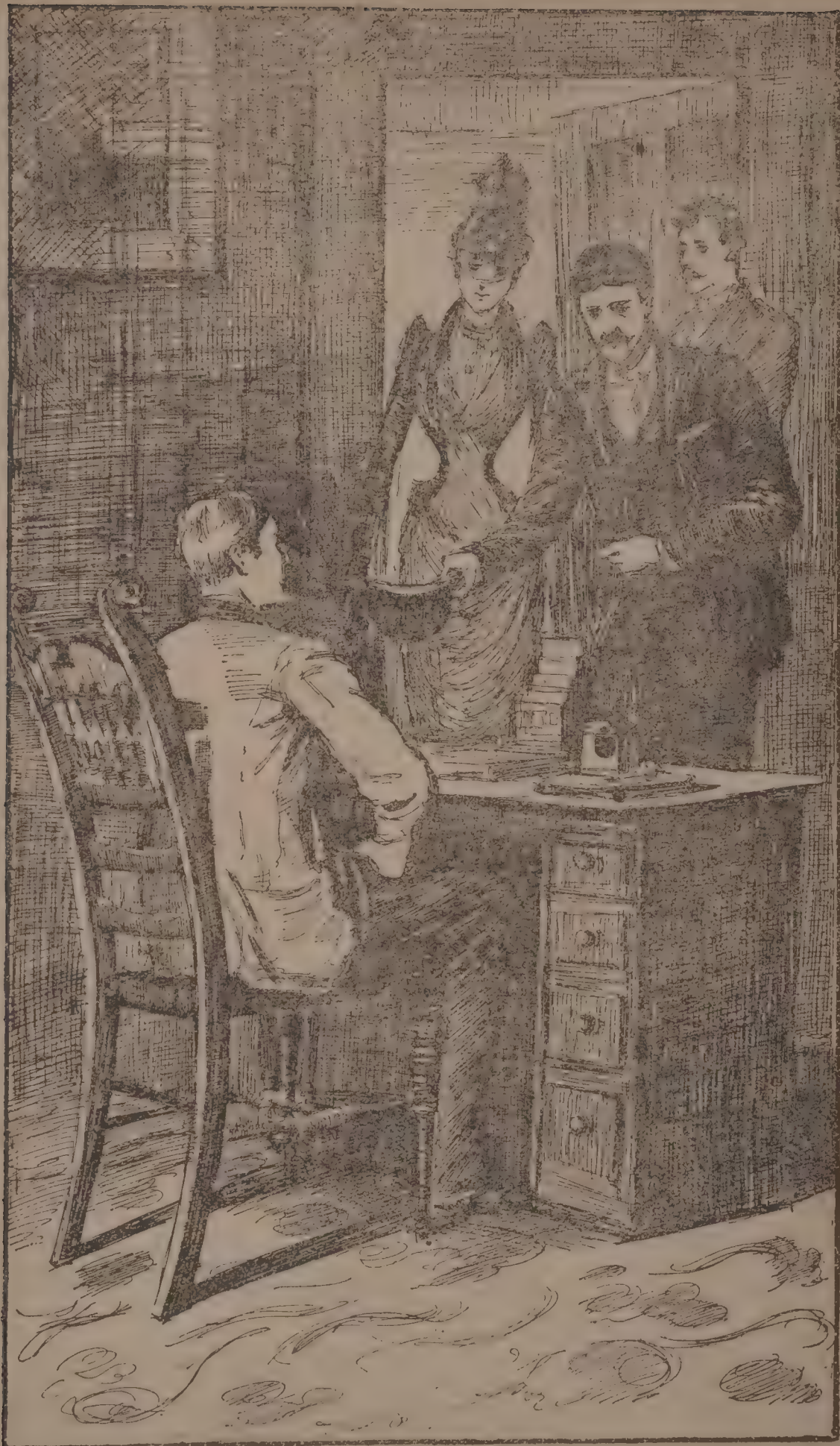
Before the words have passed her lips they are in the doorway! in the room—Stanhope and Carnes.

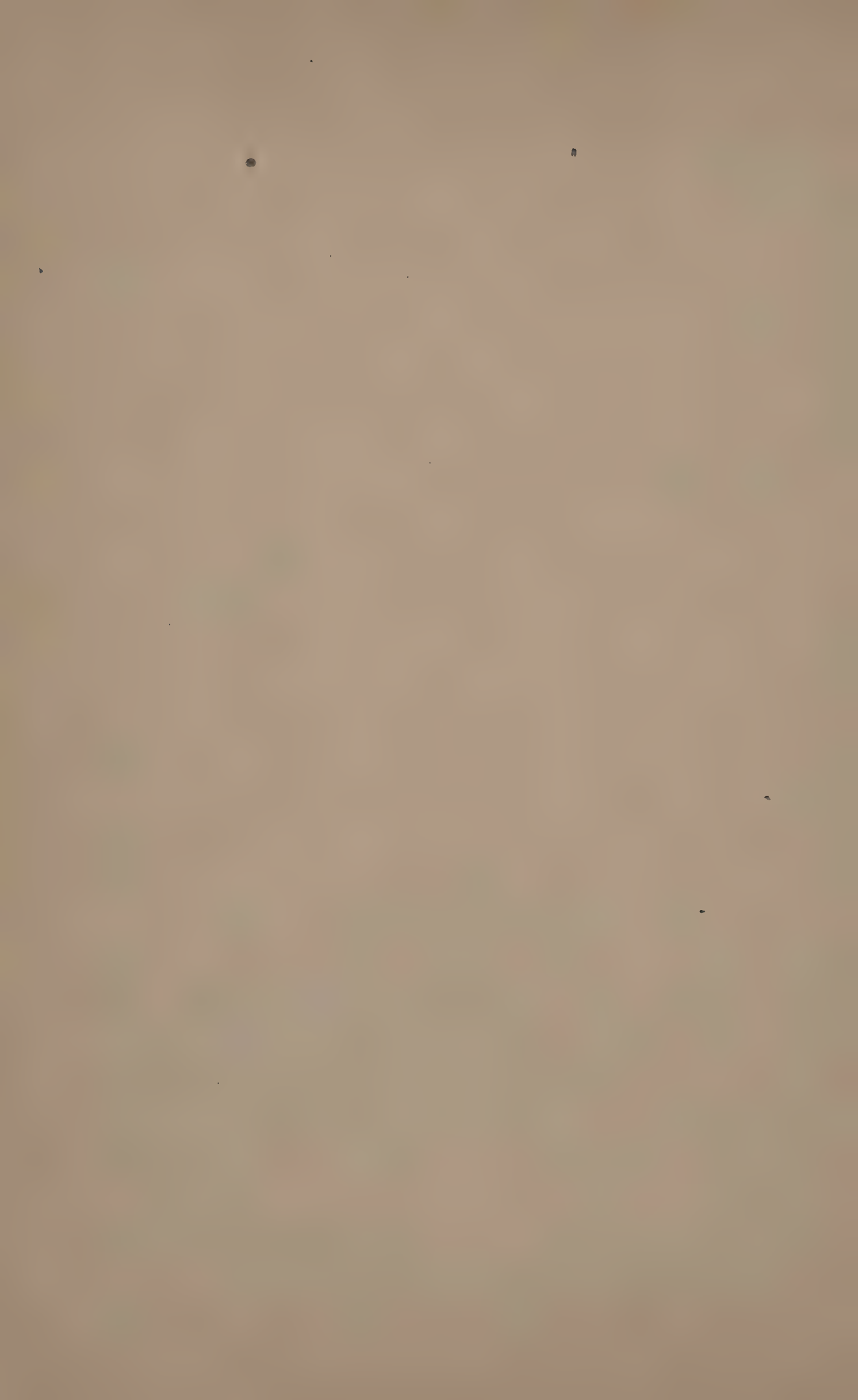
Stanhope is pale and grim, but Carnes is jubilant.

He advances until he, like Bertha, stands opposite the blonde man behind the table, and then he makes a mocking salute:

"'Number 46,' hail! I *knew* we should meet again!"

Then the blonde face, always pale, becomes a shade paler; the eyelids for one instant droop and conceal the







steel-blue eyes; the aristocratic hands are fiercely clinched; but it is over in a moment, and the cool, slow voice is as slow and cool as ever when it says:

"Jernyngham, be so good as to introduce your friend."

"If you want to be exact," the young man addressed says shortly, "you might call me Stanhope—that's my name."

"Oh!" says Jermyn, his steel-blue glance going from Stanhope to Bertha, and back to Stanhope again, "this is better than I thought!" and his look says more than his words.

"Your opinion is not valuable at present. My friend here, whom I am happy to present, is detective Rufus Carnes—I understand that you have met before. I will name you to Mr. Carnes, if you will signify the alias which you prefer—Hartwell, Edwards, Poinsett Jermyn, or 'Number 46.' Your play is played out, sir. You are wanted at New Orleans for the murder of your wife, Ellen Jernyngham Jermyn."

"You are a bold fellow!" Jermyn sneers. "I suppose that *you* are a detective too."

"You are correct in your suppositions."

"Oh! and what have *you* done?"

"I am the man who mistook the dead body of your wife for that of this young woman, of whom I had been in search for months. A history of your career since you left that Illinois prison will prove quite as interesting to the readers of the New Orleans papers as did the history of the murder at the Hotel Victor."

Jermyn is very pale now, and he sinks into the chair behind him, but when he speaks it is the same controlled voice.

"Gentlemen," he says, "be so good as to state clearly your charge against me."

"We charge you," says Stanhope with a touch of im-

patience, "with the murder of your wife, Ellen Jernyng-ham."

"Oh, and your proofs?"

"Your past career as forger and cheat; your ten years sojourn in the penitentiary; your successful fortune-hunting expedition to Roseville with your forged letters from an English noble, will pave the way for our proofs and establish for you a suitable character; and Madam Dauphine, the man who served you as coachman and lackey, the man from whom you bought the hypodermic syringe, one Henry Weston, who saw you carry the body to room 99 of the Hotel Victor, Mr. Baring and myself, who saw you, on the night of the inquest, when you came back to the Hotel Victor, but dared not enter; Mr. Carnes here, who knows something of your past career—all will have something to say. If it should appear that we have not said enough, this other victim of yours, who believes herself to be your wife, will add her testimony."

"That lady is my wife, and she will *not* add her testimony; for her own sake she dare not! you can bring no charge against me that does not rest upon her too; she is my wife—and my accomplice. Be so good as to remember that it is she, not I, who succeeded to Ellen Jernyng-ham's fortune."

Seeing the web closing hopelessly about him, he can yet strike this blow, deliberately, smilingly; the man who has called himself E. Percy Jermyn, the son of an English noble, is a fatalist; and in that moment when he encountered the mocking, menacing brown eyes of Rufus Carnes he has felt that his doom was upon him; that the role of haughty reserve, the icy calm, the self-suppression that he has studied through ten long years of prison servitude, and has learned so well, has served him after all for but a brief masque, and can do him no better service

now than to hide his rage, his chagrin, the terror and loathing with which he faces his fate. But his role has been well learned and it serves him to the last.

"As I wish for mercy here and hereafter!" cries the woman he has just pronounced his wife, "that man lies! I, his accomplice in this murder! At least I am not a *coward*! I would testify against you, poisoner, if I knew that my life must pay the penalty; and the only mercy I would ask should be, that we might not both hang from the same scaffold—understand me, sir? If all I can tell, the story of every act and deed of mine, from the moment when I first saw your white hypocritical face, can hasten your punishment, I will proclaim it from the house-tops if necessary! I have no thought, no wish, no intention but to tell all that I know, to make such reparation as I can. I have told the truth to these gentlemen; now say and do your worst!"

The two slow policemen, not so slow as when they passed under Mr. Jermyn's eye, are in possession of the splendid home where Ellen Jernyngham, and after her Bertha Warham, reigned for a brief season. Bertha Warham, who, though the wife of the blonde poisoner, does not know the name which the law has given her, has gone, under the guardianship of Susan, to a hotel. In the morning, under the watchful eye of Richard Stanhope, Mr. Jermyn will begin his journey back to New Orleans, a fettered prisoner.

Finding his fate inevitable, he has had, or seemed to have, but two anxieties: The first, for the fate of his scientific treatise, and the second, for the comfort of his person.

The manuscript he asks permission to take, and puts it away in a small writing-case, with a careful hand.

Then he directs them, and they pack for him, his



dressings-case, it must be the ebony one with ivory equipments, and such articles of clothing as he desires; and, thus prepared, he awaits the beginning of his journey with high bred composure.

## CHAPTER LXX

### THREE TESTS

At last the day has come when Joseph Larsen is to emerge from the hospital for the insane, and take his place in the world again. It is more than a week since he was pronounced sane, but reasons, pretexts, have been found for keeping him within the walls until Rufus Carnes shall be ready to take personal supervision of his future.

During this week of his sanity the physician in charge has applied various tests, acting upon hints given by Carnes, and Larsen has stood them heroically. Susan, that invaluable helper in emergencies, has been the medium for some of these tests; she is the first visitor whom Larsen is permitted to see, and, once in her life, for a purpose, and with considerable effort, be it said, she is garrulous. She recalls to him the events that preceded his loss of reason, she talks volubly of Mrs. Warham's murder, and pronounces maledictions upon her assassin.

Larsen remembers it all; declares himself ready to offer a large reward for the arrest of the villain, as soon as he shall come into possession of his heritage, and then gruffly tells her to hold her tongue on that subject.

He also admits for her consideration the suggestion that *she* has become crack-brained, and hints that she might remain in the asylum as his successor, with profit to herself.

This is the first test, and it succeeds—and fails: succeeds in convincing the doctors that Larsen's brain has indeed returned to its normal condition, and may be trusted to do its own thinking; and fails, in that it assures Carnes that, with returning reason, caution, and not remorse, is predominant.

The next day Susan comes again, and the next test is applied. She tells him, with lavish and ingenious detail, that a certain Charlie Jenkins has been arrested with jewels belonging to Mrs. Warham in his possession; that he is now lying in prison awaiting his trial, and that his case looks a hopeless one. He betrays considerable interest in this story, and roughly asks her why she did not tell him this at once. To which Susan replies that she feared to excite him—that naturally it *would* excite him—at which he flies into a rage and declares that they must let him out at once; he means to help prosecute this fellow.

Hearing this the doctor and Carnes, who are concealed listeners at each interview, exchange glances, and the one smiles, while the other grinds his teeth.

This experiment, like the first, is a success and a failure.

It is noticeable however that from this interview dates his impatience at their delayed "processes," his anxiety to be out in the world. Until this second visit from Susan he has manifested no uneasiness, has been stolidly indifferent, scarcely inquiring into their reasons for the delay.

And then comes Susan's third visit, and the third and last test.

She tells him that Bertha Warham's dead body has been found in New Orleans, brought home, and buried in Upton cemetery.

Then a change comes over him; an excitement that al-



most overmasters him; but it is not the excitement of grief; it is not a sign of returning madness; it is as sane as love turned to bitterness, jealousy at rest, suspense merged into certainty, can ever be in a man like Larsen.

He says it openly: he is glad she is dead; she had better, ten thousand times better, be dead than alive to torture him, to flout him, to drive him mad again. Now, at least he can stand by her grave and know that he is as near to her as any other man can ever be. He is quite unreserved with Susan; why not? does she not know the history of his hopeless infatuation? It is a relief to speak as he feels.

Again the unseen listeners, Carnes and the doctor, exchange meaning glances; again the one smiles, the other frowns, but on this occasion the smile and the frown are reversed.

Whether this experiment is a success or a failure, or both, neither seems quite prepared to say.

"There," says the doctor, when Susan has made a permanent retreat, after receiving the hearty thanks and praises of the bluff detective; "There is the key to the situation. The mere name of this girl has more power to move him than all the horrors of memory, all the pangs of remorse. In fact the fellow's fancy for this girl has absorbed and eaten out all other sensibilities." The doctor has been now for some days in full possession of the strange story that has woven itself about Larsen and Bertha Warham, and all our other actors in it. "Look at it! do you think the man's stolidity, when the facts of that murder were rehearsed for his benefit, and to refresh his memory, was actual self-control? No sir. No sir; he has no more sense of the enormity of his crime, than if he were a tiger and that woman his lawful prey."

"And yet you call him restored—a sane man?"

"Just as sane as the tiger in his jungle; each is

true to his instinct. Sane! If brutality were insanity, we would not have enough sane men left to transact the world's business and go to congress. Perhaps you think the fellow does not fully realize the hideousness of his position relative to that poor fellow you call Jinkins! What does he care for Jinkins! Jinkins' danger is his safety. He would see Jinkins hung for his crime with secret satisfaction, and go home and sleep after it better than he slept before. It would be, to him, his first night of absolute safety. No sir, on these two points he is as callous as the beast of the field; the only thing that can drive him out of himself, beyond himself, *now*, is this girl whom he thinks dead; and *she* might even drive him back into insanity."

"By Jove!" ejaculates Carnes, and he slaps his hand lustily upon his knee.

"What now?"

"Nothing—only two heads are better than one!"

"May I ask what you mean to do with this reptile, now that you have got him? He is in your hands from this moment; I'm glad to wash mine of him."

"Clap him into prison straight. Accuse him of his crime. Let him see that we know all about it. Present our evidence to Sharp and try to make him hold his hand; make a counter-case of it. Try to wring a confession from Larsen; confront Jinkins or Jernyngham with his friends; compel him to take control of his sister's fortune—it comes to him by her will—and to make a stand for himself; that's our program as far as arranged."

"And if that fails?"

"If *that* fails—you have given me a hint upon which I shall act."

## CHAPTER LXXI

### HIMSELF AGAIN

"Some visitors to see you, Jenkins!" Charlie Jenkins lifts his head from his hand—he is always sitting thus now, except for the half-hour when he listlessly peruses the morning papers, or when his jailor serves him with his meals.

The long months of his confinement, added to his sickness, have left him very wan, and weak, and gentle; pathetically patient; only lighting up a very little when Circus Fan, of late almost his only visitor, appears, to sit with him for half an hour, and rally and pity him by turns.

The visitors who enter now are both strangers to him, and he looks mildly up into their faces, and wonders vaguely why they are here.

They are pleasant visitors to see—the one a handsome, frank-faced young man, and the other a lady, young, lovely, and with eyes brimming with compassion.

"Jernyngham, my dear boy," the young man says, "how glad I am to see you—and how sorry to see you here! Have you forgotten Ken Baring?"

"Ken Baring!" what long-forgotten memories stir the heart of the poor, pale prisoner! what strange new sensations spring into life!—recognition, rebellion, hope, shame. One glance—yes, they are the same frank eyes that he knew in such different days; it is the same kindly voice and smile; the head of the hapless fellow



falls forward upon his arms, and sobs, pitiful to hear, shake his thin frame.

"This is harder," he thinks when he can think at all, "more humiliating, more bitter, than all the rest! Kenneth Baring, the friend of his prosperity, to see him thus!"

Presently a hand is laid upon his head, not a man's hand surely—a softer, tenderer touch; and then a voice—a sweet, pitying, womanly voice, speaks to him; he closes his eyes; he can even fancy that he is dead, and in the presence of pitying angels.

But it is a practical woman who is saying soothingly:

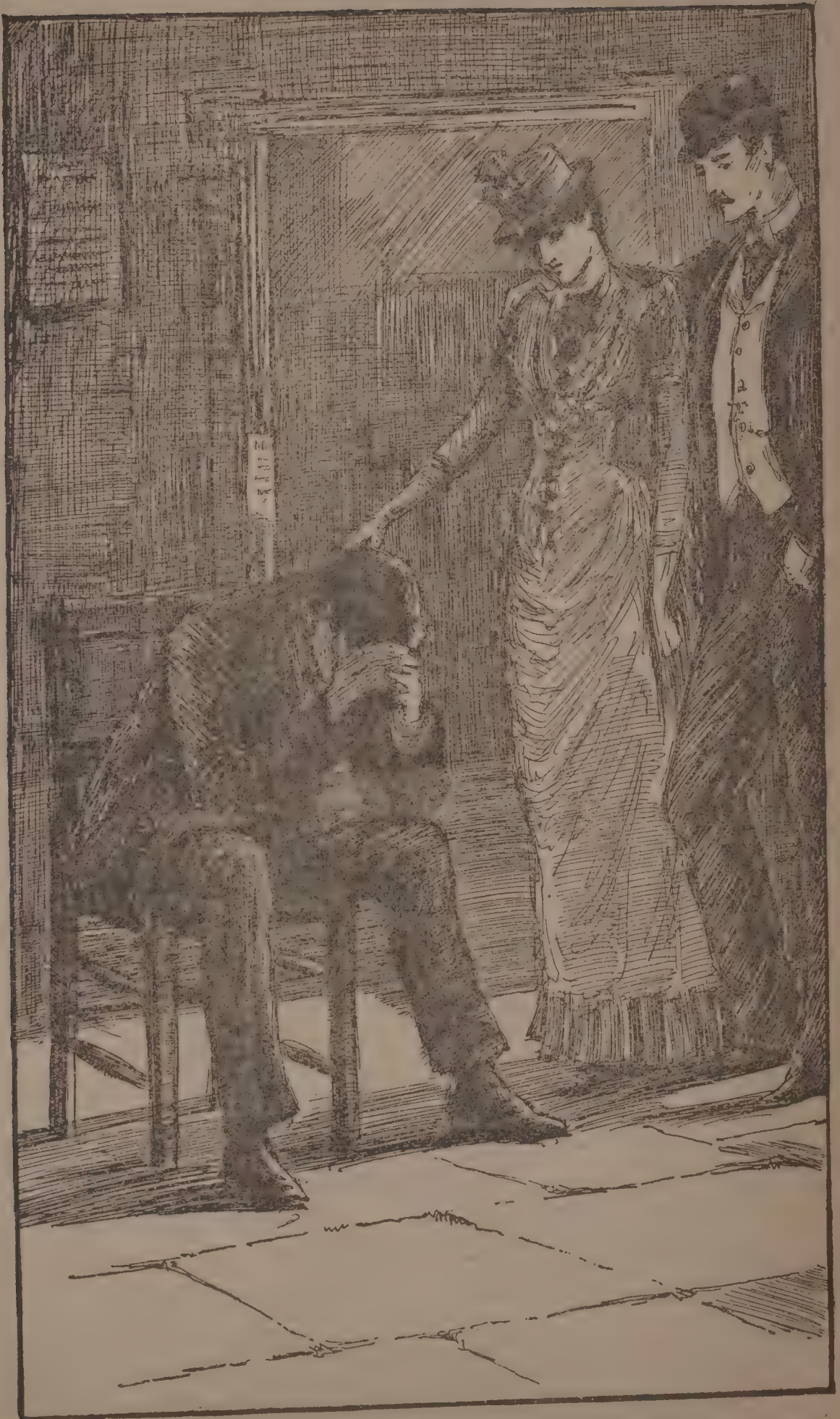
"Mr. Jernyngham, pray do not be distressed. I fear my husband has startled you in his eagerness. Try to be calm; your friends have found you out, and you have much to hope for."

Much to hope for—he? But the soothing touch lingers upon his head, the musical voice chimes on, uttering soft gentle words of comfort and hope, and presently the sobs die away, the shoulders cease to heave—he becomes calmer, and listens, still with his head bent.

It is a dream, of course, but it is such a pleasant dream; he is in no haste to waken.

Then the other voice speaks again, cheery, sensible words, and a new life seems stirring within him—a soul he has long thought dead, the soul of Carl Jernyngham, as it lived within him before he became so fallen, so hopeless, so hapless; before he became a wanderer, an outcast—before he became drunken Charlie Jinkins—awakened.

The words that now fall upon his ears are very pleasant words; and the voice is a very pleasant voice; but it is not the masculine voice—explain it who can; seldom is it so very suggestive of an angelic visitant. Perhaps after all he is *not* dreaming.



PRESENTLY A HAND IS LAID UPON HIS HEAD.—Slender Clue, p. 626.





By and by he ventures to lift his head; and it is not the head of Charlie Jenkins, it is Carl Jernyngham rehabilitated. Then he is vaguely conscious of two firm hands grasping his own, and hears dreamily that Baring knows all of his trials, and still hopes; that he congratulates him, condoles with him, plans for him, and intends to work for him; that the lovely woman with the soothing hand, is a flesh-and-blood woman, who can laugh like music, and smile seraphically; that she is Baring's wife, and *his* friend, whether he will or no.

Then there is talk of his sister, and he hears that Mrs. Baring knew her, and that she is dead; and while he is vaguely conscious that he ought to be grief-smitten, and yet is only slightly touched, the talk is interrupted, and a worldly, oh! a very worldly voice, although it is cheery, and pleasant, and reassuring, sounds from the doorway; and he sees a big, broad shouldered, smiling man standing therein.

"Well," this new presence says, "have you brought him to his senses?"

Then Carl Jernyngham starts up. Is he dreaming after all? that voice is as familiar as if he had heard it only yesterday. The face, too! He looks closer, looks again. "The rector," he stammers, new light breaking upon him.

Baring laughs heartily.

"No more a rector than I am," he says. "That man is Detective Carnes, Jernyngham. You didn't stand much chance against *him* old fellow; but he *does* insist that he made a most respectable dominie."

"I did," asserts Carnes stoutly, "didn't I, Jernyngham?"

The appearance of this broad-shouldered, sharp-tongued detective convinces him at last. It is not a dream; all this strangeness is true, all these surprises are real.

Carl Jernyngham sits down again, and then Baring's pretty wife appropriates the only remaining chair, while his two masculine visitors content themselves with a seat upon his hard bed, and they talk, make explanations, clear away mysteries, lay plans.

When at last they are gone, and Carl Jernyngham is alone in his cell again, it is full of sunshine; there is a rose upon the rude table at his elbow, and hope is singing in his heart.

While he is thinking over the wonderful happenings of the morning, another visitor is ushered in. It is Circus Fan. There are red rims about her eyes, but there is a queer twinkle, that is anything but an indication of sorrow, lurking within them.

"Well, Charlie Jenkins," she says with prompt cheerfulness, "and how do you find yourself to-day?"

"Fan!" he is on his feet and is holding both her hands, not beautiful hands, by the way—and not too clean. "Fan *you* have been my friend from the first!—through all my dark days. I have had a strange dream, a lovely dream; and if it ever comes true, *you* shall profit by it, be sure. You were the first to call me Charlie Jenkins, weren't you, Fan? and I am glad that you can be the last. I'm glad to introduce myself to you before another has the chance. You haven't asked about my real name for some time, Fan."

Fan draws back, and her voice quavers a little. "What is it, Charlie?"

"It's Carl Jernyngham."

"My! C. J.—well I got the initials all right didn't I—Mr. Jernyngham?"

She is half-crying, half-laughing, and he makes a sudden clutch at her sleeve.

"Fan, you have seen them, you know—"

"Seen *who*, Mr. Jernyngham?"

"Seen Baring, and his wife, and the detective?"

"The detective! Oh, Charlie Jinkins—I mean—Mr. Jernyngham, I've been hand and glove with that detective for *months*. It was him that set me at you to try and make you tell your true name. I never should have had the heart to torment you so if I hadn't hoped that you would be the gainer in the end. My! but didn't he make a splendid parson!"

"And the others, Fan?"

"Oh! I never saw *them*, until yesterday. Charlie—there, I've done it again—it's my opinion that Mrs. Baring is just a little angel!"

"That's precisely what I thought," says Jernyngham, and tears spring to his eyes.

On the morning of the next day, Carl Jernyngham is again visited by Carnes and Kenneth Baring, for there are many things to be discussed and details given of things only touched upon in their previous interviews.

In the afternoon he has yet other callers—brave, kindly Rene Baring, and Bertha Warham, the woman who has worn his sister's name, and usurped her place. They are accompanied to the door of the cell by Kenneth Baring, but here he leaves them and they enter alone.

Bertha Warham's first act has been to restore her blonde locks, by removing the hated dye that had been necessary to complete her likeness to Ellen Jernyngham; and in this effort she has sacrificed the long luxuriant coils of hair that once were her pride and glory, and now with short golden rings curling all about her head, with her pale face, and new look of humility, Bertha Warham is a fairer vision than even the one which escaped from Joseph Larsen, in that same city, and near that same spot long months before.



"Mr. Jernyngham," says Rene Baring gently, this is Bertha Warham. She wishes very much to hear that you are not her enemy."

"I am not her enemy," he replies. "My hate is all bestowed upon the man whose sin shut me up here, and upon my sister's murderer. Miss Warham, it seems to me, has been sinned against, has been a victim almost as much as poor Ellen. Miss Warham, if I can ever prove to you that my words are sincere, if I can in any way help to make your unhappy position less unhappy, I shall be glad to prove to you that I bear you no ill will."

"Your words have convinced me of that, Mr. Jernyngham," Bertha says in a low voice, "and I thank you. I came to restore to you something that is yours. It is your sister's will. It was made before she set out on that fatal journey South, and left in the hands of her lawyers—not the old Phliadelphia firm, who had transacted the business of the estate for your father in his life-time—but a New York firm, chosen by Mr. Jermyn after their removal to that city. They were honorable men, for he dared not choose others. On board the steamer, coming up from New Orleans, he put into my hands your sister's journals; from them I learned where her will was to be found, and the first time I went out alone I went to that office, of course in the character of Mrs. Jermyn, and asked them to give me that document, and to make an exact copy which they might deliver into Mr. Jermyn's hands should he call for it. I then secured a box in a reliable savings bank, and made sure of the will by depositing it there, together with some trinkets and a small sum of my own money. Before long Mr. Jermyn, as I had anticipated, proposed that this will be destroyed, and a new one made—in his favor, of course. I agreed and went with him to get the second will, the copy, from the lawyer's. I suppose they

drew their own inferences from our conduct; but what they thought gave me little trouble. I put off the new will from time to time, and, when evasion would no longer serve, told Mr. Jermyn that I should feel more comfortable *not* to forge a will, until we had become better acquainted. I had feared him, in secret, from the moment when I took the last irrevocable step, and put myself thus so entirely in his power. Take the will, Mr. Jernyngham, the time will soon come when you will be free to possess your sister's estates, and then you will hear from me again. There is yet restitution to be made; my father is wealthy, and I am only too sure of forgiveness and a welcome from him. I shall ask him to help me pay the debt I owe to *you*, at least."

She is speaking with all sincerity. To do Bertha Warham justice, her one thought, at this moment, is to undo, where she can, the wrong she has done. She is waiting now for a message from Susan, who, having performed her part in the experiment upon Joseph Larsen, has gone back to Upton, to break to the lonely sick old man the news that his daughter Bertha is not lying in the Upton graveyard after all.

"Your sister's journals," Bertha resumes, "are in the hands of Mr. Stanhope and Carnes; they hold them for use, if necessary, when that murderer comes to trial; after that they will be restored to you, and—Mr. Jernyngham, Joseph Larsen *will confess* his crime soon. I am sure of it—so sure that I am not afraid to offer you my congratulations *now*, and to wish you a long and peaceful life."

As she ceases, he advances quickly and extends his hand; and she, with a surprised upward glance, places her own within it and murmuring "Good-bye, and thank you, Mr. Jernyngham," she hurries from the cell, leaving Rene to utter an astonished and hasty adieu, and to follow as best she can.

## CHAPTER LXXII

### THE LAST CARD

The days follow each other as summer days will, and the time for "Charley Jenkins'" trial is close at hand, in spite of the "counter case," in spite of everything that Carnes and Stanhope and a brace of astute lawyers can do.

Joseph Larsen has regained his liberty only to lose it again; has gone from his cell in the mad-house to a cell in prison, charged with the murder of Lucretia Warham; and Carnes has labored mightily to wring from him a confession of the crime, but to no purpose. Larsen is wrathful, defiant, obstinate; on the subject of the murder he is dumb.

In vain Carnes traces for him his course, up to the very night of the crime; shows him how he has been watched; recounts to him all the discoveries made by Patsy, who now, as ever, is Carnes' stanchest henchman, and stands ready to testify to the extent of his knowledge. Larsen is obdurate. He will confess nothing; he has nothing to confess. They may keep him a prisoner if they will; it is nothing to him to be a prisoner; when they have hanged the other fellow, the murderer, they will have to release him. His stolid indifference, his bravado is maddening, and Rufus Carnes, burning with indignation, goes away each day after a fruitless interview, feeling a growing desire to fly at his throat and throttle the truth from between his lips.

Stanhope, since his return from New Orleans, has not



been near Larsen. He has not seen him since the night, very long ago it seems to him, since he consigned him, a gibbering mouthing, madman, to the tender mercies of the mad-house. But at length the day comes when Carnes says to him:

"It's of no use, Dick; time's growing short; we must play our last card."

"It will win," says Stanhope.

"I don't know, Dick, I don't know. I'm beginning to be superstitious about that fellow; he's my old man of the sea. I've hated him from the first, yes, from the moment I set eyes on him at the theater, where Martin pointed him out. It's been a growing hatred; and of late there are moments when I dread the fellow; sometimes the sight of him sets me into a creeping chill. Ugh!"

"Look here. Carnes, this won't do, you know. You always had a vein of old woman in you, that I never was able to account for, unless it is because you are one of those people who have no medium for anything—you have no simple likes and dislikes, no aversions and attractions, you must love or loathe a person. A thing to you, is perfect or it is hideous, and you *know* you are superstitious."

"Do you mean that I look for the moon over my right shoulder, turn my tea-cup for luck, and stay at home on Friday?"

"Well, no, not quite so bad as that. You are superstitious about sensations; you see visions, and dream dreams."

"So did the prophets of old—a very respectable body of men, as you would know if you would take the trouble to peruse that splendid piece of ancient history called the Bible. I dream dreams? yes. I dreamed one last night. I have dreamed the same thing, or nearly the same, twice before."

"Tell it," says Stanhope with a light laugh. "Tell it, and break the spell."

"Will that break it? well, maybe you wouldn't call it a dream; it was a picture, or vision, rather. I was standing on the top of a globe or ball."

"North Pole?" suggests Stanhope.

"Possibly. But I don't remember it's being cold there, for instantly I felt a mighty push in the rear, and turned my head as I began to fall, to see Larsen's face, all flecked with foam; as I went down I heard him laugh, and then from below the laugh was answered, and I saw the face of 'Number 46' receding, but always before me, as I sank through space."

"Upon my word, that was worthy of a dyspeptic. You must curb your appetite, Carnes."

A few moments later, Carnes, as careless and whimsical as usual, was making sundry preparations for the playing of that "last card," while Stanhope, standing at the window of the nearest telegraph office, sent to Bertha Warham a message containing a single word: "Come."

He is not a prepossessing figure as he rolls over upon his couch, with a snarl at the intrusion, and shows to his visitor a hideous growth of bushy black beard, two sullen, cavernous eyes overhung by thick black brows that almost meet above his large nose, a sallow, haggard breadth of brow and cheek, showing more sallow by contrast with the thick, unkempt, overhanging locks; untidy in his dress, stooping more than ever, and slouching in gait as he walks the narrow width of his cell, Joseph Larsen is as unlovely as his life.

"You again!" he says it gruffly, as his eyes fall upon Carnes in the doorway, and then, as Carnes steps aside and he sees the figure behind him, he starts up and utters an imprecation, then sinks back upon his couch,

and his sallow face becomes livid; whether it is with fear or rage they cannot tell.

Carnes is smiling and inconsequent of manner, but Stanhope's face is set and stern—it is the face that looked down upon him as he lay, felled by a strong hand, in John Warham's kitchen—it is the face that looked him down, cowed him, and gave him into the custody of the sheriff, later—it was the last face he saw before reason forsook him in Warham's darkened parlor, beside the encoffined body of his murdered mother. Truly, in planning for just such an emergency as this of the present, they have been wiser than they knew. Already their work is half-accomplished; memory, not dead but stunned, or only half-wakened, is pricked, as by a spur, at sight of this strong, stern, manly young fellow standing erect before him, looking down upon him with a fearless gaze, that he knows will not flinch before his foulest imprecation, his wildest fury.

Instinctively he throws out his hand as if to ward or warn him off.

"So," says the deep full voice of Stanhope, "so I have got to do this over again—assassin, you are not satisfied yet; you want to shift the burden of your sin upon innocent shoulders; you want to commit another murder. Fool! don't you know that you have never been out of my sight? Do you think I will *ever* let you out of my sight, until I have you upon the gallows, with a rope around your neck? What can you do out in the world, a man with the blood of his mother upon his hands? Do you think we cannot see it? Do you think the whole world cannot see it?"

Involuntarily the cowering wretch moves his hands as if to conceal them, and looks down upon them quickly.

Seeing his success the young detective goes on.

"Do you think that you can go among honest men, and



look them in the face, and declare your innocence? Try it. Look *me* in the face!"

The tortured creature writhes, makes a mighty effort, looks up, and drops his eyes again quickly, leaps to his feet, roars out a volley of oaths, and seems about to spring upon his inquisitor. An instant, he is held by the keen eye, then he does spring, hissing like a serpent, directly at Stanhope's throat.

But it is his own throat that is clutched in a grasp of steel, and he is forced back to his place, upon the side of the couch, the piercing eyes never letting go their hold upon his.

"Don't try that again, Larsen," Stanhope says scornfully. "It won't do you any good. Pull yourself together; try to look a little less like a wild animal, and listen to me: Before Carl Jernyngham is brought to trial you are going to make a full confession in the presence of a notary; just as you did at John Warham's."

"I won't—you lie."

"You think you won't, but you *will*. I won't trouble you to begin at the beginning this time. You needn't tell about your peregrinations among the hackdrivers, and street-stalls; nor about your changes of hotel, and visits to all the theaters; you were looking for Bertha Warham *then*. Just begin with the day you met Mrs. Warham on the street, and put her into the carriage and drove about with her, while you talked matters over; tell of your meeting the next day, when she told you that she had left you all her money. Tell how you planned to decoy her out on Saturday night, how you were enraged because she told you that if you did not give up your senseless search for Bertha she would alter her will; how she told you that Bertha had never cared for you, and goaded you on until you persuaded her, by lies, into going with you into that deserted street where you killed her, and dragged her body into an alley."

A shudder agitates the big frame crouching now upon the couch, then he gathers himself again for resistance.

"I will tell nothing!" he fairly yells. "I have nothing to tell! what do I care for you—for any one!"

"You will confess! I will call the dead from their graves to force the truth from you!"

Even as he speaks the door swings slowly open, and Bertha Warham stands in the doorway. She stands in the shadow, pale and stern, robed in some light gray garment, and never more beautiful than now, with her wealth of short clustering hair, and her glowing, menacing eyes.

Larsen staggers up, and stretches out his arms. "Bertha!" he gasps. "My God—*Bertha!*"

"Tell the truth, Joseph Larsen," she says sternly. "Tell it, or your dead mother will come out of her grave to denounce you."

"Oh!" he cries; "Bertha! *Bertha!*" and his pallor becomes deadly.

"Murderer!" she says again, "tell the truth!"

It is enough—he no longer sees the others about him. He sees only that pale avenging face.

"I did it!" he cries hoarsely, "I killed her! I killed her! because—" It ends there. He falls forward, and Carnes and Stanhope catch him and place him upon the couch.

When he again opens his eyes, she is standing at the foot of the couch; there are others there, Carnes, Stanhope, a doctor and a notary at a little table near the grated window; it is nearly twilight, and the cell is growing dim.

"Tell the truth," Bertha says again, and, little heeding whether she is flesh or spirit, the tortured wretch, doubly tortured, from without and from within, gives up his hideous secret, and the notary by the darkening window rapidly pens the confession that is to set Carl Jernyng-ham free, and proclaim him innocent.

## CHAPTER LXXIII

### PRACTICALLY SETTLED

Whether his energies have become lessened, and his mental powers somewhat relaxed in his southern prison, or whether he has lost a portion of the enthusiasm which he expended upon his scientific treatise, on the day—his last day in New York—when he announced to Mrs. Jermyn his intentions to complete that important work within the week, it is not easy to say. Certain it is, however, that weeks have passed and the treatise is not yet finished.

It lies before him upon his table, one sultry afternoon, and he lays aside his pen reluctantly, to welcome his lawyer who enters, mopping a perspiring brow, and looking morose.

"Well," says Mr. Jermyn, pushing back his chair and rising, "you find it uncomfortable work?" and he presents his own chair, the most comfortable of the two in the cell, and seats himself in the other.

"Uncomfortable! Yes, and deuced unpleasant. Man, I wonder at your coolness." Mr. Jermyn smiles, his old superior smile.

"I have turned your case over thoroughly as you asked—"

"And—as I asked, are you prepared to give me your candid opinion?"

"Yes, and glad to ease my mind—Jermyn, we haven't a leg to stand on!"

"You mean that the jury won't acquit me."



"I mean they *can't* acquit you, not even if they were more gullible, more open to bribery, and all the other tricks, than they, or any other jury, will be sure to be. You don't know *how* those two detectives, confound them, have hunted you up and down, traced your ins and outs? they haven't left you a loop-hole; and you fixed things cleverly too. You didn't bungle. And that wife of yours—a nice wife she—I wrote her—"

"I told you that it would be useless."

"Yes. I know you did; useless! listen to this!"

He takes a letter from his pocket, opens it rapidly, snaps a pair of glasses upon his nose and reads:

"DEAR SIR, etc., etc.

"In answer to your appeal in behalf of the man whom you call Jermyn, I have only to say that he is my husband in law, not in love; and that I shall 'appear against him,' if called upon to do so, with no more compunction than I would feel in testifying against a stranger assassin. I have nothing more to say, and no message to send your client. BERTHA WARHAM."

"There! there's *one* woman who can make herself understood! Well, sir, in my opinion this letter *settles it*."

"You think it's a hopeless case, then?"

"I do. Of course I shall carry it out—game to the last. And I know *you're* game enough. But—yes, sir, it's *practically settled*."

Jermyn makes no comment; he seems to dismiss the subject with a move of the hand; he draws his chair toward the table, and begins to arrange the manuscript.

"Is it finished?" asks the lawyer, glad to turn from a disagreeable subject.

"Half an hour's work will finish it."

When the lawyer is gone he resumes the pen, and dips

it again in the ink; scratch, scratch, it goes steadily for four, five, ten minutes; then he looks up, lifts his hand to his head, sits thus for a moment, and takes up the pen again. Again it travels across a line or two, but not so steadily this time. He puts it down once more, and, rising, walks about the little room.

Then for the third time he takes up his pen; there are only a few more words to write. Only a page or two; but the words will not come.

He drops the pen for the last time, pushes away his chair, stands silent and moveless for a moment, his cold blue eyes looking away into space, and then goes to a trunk in the corner, lifts its lid, and takes from it a small square ebony dressing-case. He carries this to the table and opens it.

One by one he takes out the dainty ivory-mounted appointments, fingering each article slowly. Then he lifts out a velvet-lined tray and looks into the bottom of the dressing case, also velvet-lined; upon this velvet lining, near the center, he presses one forefinger, and half of a false bottom rises up, like the lid of a box, displaying a shallow receptacle, which contains a tiny pistol, a small, keen-edged knife, two or three tiny vials, and a little steel cylinder with some brightly glittering needles lying beside it. One of these he takes up, fits it to the steel instrument, and then, quickly uncorking one of the small vials, he draws half of the liquid it contains into the little syringe; a part of this he now carefully ejects, then puts down the instrument to bare his arm, and now he is ready for his work.

It is nothing after all, only the prick of a needle as its point is forced under the white skin. Then he drops the instrument back into its hiding-place, pushes down the false bottom, pulls down his sleeve and replaces his cuff with a steady hand,

He goes back to the table now, and fingers the manuscript restlessly. He even sits down and takes up the pen—then—how many moments does he sit there? he seems to be listening; he is watching his own sensations; now the pen drops from his fingers—a horrible light gleams up in his eye, then dies away to dullness; he half-staggers to his feet, drops back again, and his head falls forward upon the table.

In a few moments the guard looks through the grating of his door, sees something in his attitude that startles him, and gives the alarm.

Too late. "Number 46," ex-convict, poisoner, adventurer, he who through ten years of prison life has schooled a naturally cold, reticent nature to perfect self-repression, self-control, that he may wrest from the world that which it has grudged him, and make good to himself ten years, in which he might have wrought evil upon his fellows—"number 46" has gone the coward's road, by the coward's easiest, softest, most cowardly conveyance, over to the majority.



## CHAPTER LXXIV

### FINIS

For full forty-eight hours after his confession is signed, sealed and handed over to the proper officers, Joseph Larsen is, to all appearances, as rational as any one about him; sullen, but he is always that; sitting in one posture for hours, but eating, and answering questions, when he deigns to answer them at all, quite like anyone else, or rather, like his natural self.

But on the morning of the third day, when they look into his cell, there is a change evident; he is mad again; madder, indeed, than ever; too mad to remain in a prison cell; and so, after the necessary preliminaries are observed, Carnes and Stanhope undertake to convey him in safety back to his former cell, and former straight-jacket, in the mad-house.

He is in one of his quiet moods when they set out, but for all that, his hands are locked in handcuffs, and his guardians are prepared and keenly on the watch for any resistance.

He is so haggard, so unkempt, so evidently a mad-man, that they seat him and themselves in the smoker's car lest he should break into one of his sudden furies and so alarm some gentle female passenger. But they have not been long seated when an unforeseen *contre-temps* occurs: at a small station another patient, as mad as Larsen, and at the moment far more boisterous, is dragged on board, yelling and clanking his chains.

The sight rouses Larsen, and their first remonstrance



"OH HIDEOUS SIGHT, THEY ALL GO DOWN."—Slender Clue, p. 613.





and attempt to soothe him, goad him to fury. The car becomes a pandemonium.

They must be separated, the conductor says; the one simply urges on and exasperates the other. One must go forward. He hurries away, and presently comes back; he has vacated a place for them in the rear end of the next car, and it is Larsen who must move on, for he is eager to go, while the other will only be dragged.

The train is moving swiftly through a lovely country, and Larsen walks steadily forward, Carnes going before him, and Stanhope behind, with a hand firmly gripped upon his shoulder. Steadily and quietly the madman walks through the car, and neither of his two captors can see the lurid light in the eyes that glower upon Carnes, as he goes before. Steadily he goes out through the door, the hand tightening upon his shoulder. Steadily he steps across the narrow space between the two platforms, steadily, with his head bent; then swiftly, as Carnes opens the forward door, and turns, the two long arms bound together at the wrists are lifted high in the air and descend, like a hoop, around the shoulders of his victim; instantly the willing brakeman, who has flattened himself against the side of the car, springs forward to the rescue; instantly Stanhope's grip upon the madman tightens. It is too late; for one moment the madman puts forth the strength of a giant, as madmen will; then—oh, hideous sight! they all go down—Carnes, Larsen, Stanhope! The brakeman, fearless, honest fellow that he is, totters, grips at an iron bar, and throws out his other hand in a vain clutch after Stanhope; not altogether vain, for he grasps him—holds him thus for a moment, but the weight is too great. When the train is brought to a stop—for the scene is witnessed through two open doors,

and the bell is wildly rung by a score of hands—the gallant brakeman is swinging by one arm, bruised, half-senseless and with the shoulder—which for a horrible moment had held the swaying body of the young detective—dislocated. Stanhope, Larsen, Carnes, are lying in a senseless heap in the gorge below.

Stanhope recovers soon, and staggers to his feet; he limps frightfully, and is sore with bruises, but the brave brakeman has softened his fall, has saved his life. He has fallen atop of the others, too, and, without a thought for his own aches, he calls upon Carnes to answer him, and then groans aloud.

They are locked together still; the madman's clutch is not relaxed; his face is bloodless and foam-flecked, his eyes are wildly staring—but Carnes—he lies undermost, among briars and sharp stones, and when they lift him, the blood oozes from a ghastly wound upon his head.

There he lies, the brave, generous, tender-hearted friend; the fearless detective, the man so full of quaint eccentricities, and yet so lovable; his work is done.

Only once is he conscious, as he lies under the nearest roof, that of a sympathetic, hospitable farmer, where every care, every attention is lavished upon him. Only once does he speak, and then, as he opens his eyes, and sees Stanhope's sorrowful face bent above him, it is to him that he murmurs:

"Dick, old fellow—it had to be; it is all right—God bless you, Dick—there is something for you in Somer's safe at the old hotel; he'll give it to you—it's the only thing of mine that you'll care to have," and then again groping feebly for his friend's hand—"God bless you, Dick!"

They are his last words, and when the last breath had fluttered feebly past his lips, Richard Stanhope bows

his head and weeps for his truest, best-beloved friend.

His death is almost painless. He has no friends, no relative, in all the world; and when Bertha Warham comes with Susan, and begs that he may be taken to Upton and buried there under the whispering trees in the pretty cemetery where Ellen Jernyngham and Mrs. Warham are lying, Stanhope does not refuse.

"He will have at least two friends near," Bertha says sadly, "so long as Susan lives and as I live, there'll be some one to care for his grave."

"A strange whim of Bertha Warham's," Kenneth Baring says to his wife, when they go together to stand beside this newly made grave. But Rene looks up through tearful eyes and says:

"Don't you understand, Ken? she admired and respected him; and then—he was Stanhope's friend."

But Joseph Larsen—one of the arms that dragged his victim down is broken, and he has dislocated a hip; the entire body too has come in for its share of bruises, and it is impossible to care for him properly. He tears away his bandages, curses his attendants, refuses all medicine and food, flings his battered frame from the bed to the floor, and, yelling with pain and fury, is bound again. He is a broken fiend, but a fiend none the less.

Drugged into quiet, he comes back to consciousness with fresh ravings, and so, raving, cursing, rending himself, he lingers through three dismal weeks, and then dies horribly, a madman to the last.

It is early Autumn, and once more there is a bright group upon Jacob Baring's fine lawn, and, so great are the changes wrought by time and "the logic of events," it is a very harmonious group, although "Aunt Jake" is the hostess, and head of the feast, and Kenneth Baring and Rene are present—present, too, as guests of honor;



once more the Sunderland girls are there, and the Roseveltdts; Charlie Brian and Lotta are there too, for Linnett is to be married to-morrow to a splendid young divine—a party so well known, so tried, so humanly good, and socially unexceptionable, that even Aunt Jake can find no flaw in him.

Ellen Jernynghnam is not there, but she is not far away. Her grave lies almost within the sound of their voices. A shaft of white marble marks it, and fresh flowers in their season are always to be found upon it.

Carl Jernyngham's first act, upon entering the world again as Carl Jernyngham, has been to bring her here; and proud as she may have been, in life, mistaken, unloved and unlovable, there are many who pity her now; and no grave in Roseville is oftener visited by pitying young souls whom, in her life-time, she might have scorned, but who, looking down upon her grassy bed, now say softly, tenderly, "Poor, poor Ellen Jernyngham!"

And now there is a flutter upon the lawn, and two anxiously expected guests are coming—Stanhope and Carl Jernyngham.

Everybody welcomes them eagerly, and feminine hearts flutter at sight of the frank-faced, good-looking young detective, with his free, careless gayety, and his cheery smile.

But Rene soon takes possession of him.

"I began to fear a disappointment," she says. "We expected you yesterday."

"We came by a roundabout road," he answers, his face growing grave. "Jernyngham and I have been to Upton."

"Oh! and did you see Bertha?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about her. I have thought of her so often. I wrote her twice, but her answers were so constrained that I did not attempt the third letter. I feared that

my well-meant attentions might be painful to her."

"I don't know," Stanhope says thoughtfully. "I think if I were you, I would continue to write her. I wish you would; she has had a serious trial, and Susan says she has borne it bravely. To go back there and begin her life over again in the face of all the country curiosity, and village gossip, must have required some heroism. And she has made herself the constant companion and nurse to that failing old man. It was on his account principally that I went there just now; although I should have gone, soon, in any case—I wanted to see Carnes' grave."

"Ah! that noble life! To think that it should have ended so! "

"Yes. It is the fate of more than one fine fellow, skillful and fearless, to die so. But the world does not think of that phase of a detective's life. It applauds our exploits, and knows little of our graves, and how we come to them. I have seen more than one life wiped out as quickly. Poor Carnes! no one can miss him as I do, for no one knew him so well. Do you remember the legacy he left me?"

"The packet in the care of his landlord in Chicago?"

"Yes. It was a large journal, or rather, the story of his life. You know his past was always a mystery to us all; he never alluded to it, and no one dared or would question him. What a strange story it was! and how it explains many of his eccentricities. I will try and tell you about it sometime—perhaps you may read it."

"I should so like to! But tell me, is Bertha becoming content?"

"Well, I hardly know; she is calm, as composed as a statue. Her father is very low; he asked them to send for me, not for any special purpose; it was a sick man's restlessness, I suppose. Miss Warham will soon be an

orphan, and mistress of a large fortune—everything John Warham touched seems to have turned into money. I don't know what she will do, but she is capable of a career of some kind; and I don't think she will ever be content to be a mere society woman now. Susan and she seem strangely attached to each other. She told me, when I spoke to her of Susan's faithfulness, good sense, and courage, that she looked upon Susan as her best friend now, and that wherever she went she would not part with her. I think Susan would like nothing better."

"Well, I have spoken to Kenneth about an idea of mine. When we go to New York I want to go and see Bertha. Do you think she would care to see me?"

"I am sure of it; she is very grateful to you."

"Oh, by the way," laughing a little, "what has become of Circus Fan?"

"I am glad you asked that; she lives in a pretty cottage, and has a monthly income that enables her to live quite at her ease. Jernyngham behaved very generously, and he by no means turns his back upon his old friend, but—she will always be Circus Fan,"—laughing in his turn. "You should see her bonnets—and the pictures in her parlor."

"I will. I'll make Ken take me there when we go to Chicago. Come now, I see some sharp glances turning this way; let me introduce you to the bride-to-be."

Once again it is the carnival season, and Mr. Henry Weston is again in New Orleans. He hardly hopes for such another sensation as that in which he had a part a year ago, for Mr. Weston is fond of sensations of an impersonal nature; but he has fallen in with a party much to his liking, and has become their self-appointed chaperon and expounder. They are English tourists of



the most pronounced type, and they are languidly bent upon seeing everything.

In their tour of inspection they find themselves, one day, at police headquarters, and being evidently personages of more or less importance, all the privileges of a visitor are extended to them by southern official courtesy.

While one of their party is standing open-mouthed before a collection of faces in the rogues' gallery, he utters an exclamation of astonishment that brings the others promptly to his side.

"What's it about, Cawney?" asks the last comer.

"Upon my word! Look at this fellah; if he aint some-thin' like that cad that made old Ralph Jermyn all that bother. Say, aint he, Eames?"

"Ain't he!" cries Eames. "Might be his own brother—clever rascal!"

"That picture,"—it is Weston who is speaking—"just ask *me* about him; Jermyn did you say? why that's what *he* called himself."

"Naw!"

"Yes, sir. Poisoned his wife right here in this city a year ago Mardi Gras day. Then killed himself same way. Hypodermic route, you know—morphia."

"By Jove!"

"Did you know him? who was he? what was his real name?"

"Never had any, if it is the same fellah. •Mystery about him, and all that; taken out of charity, they say, by one Foster Jermyn, sir Ralph Foster, he is now. Reared with his sons. Keen, polished, aristocratic-looking fellah. Forged on the old man, forged on one of his sons. Old man shipped him to America—oh! years ago; was a boy in jackets myself, but remember it well enough. Old man heard that he had committed forgery over here, and

been convicted. Come out, Weston, and tell us all about it."

As they go out and turn their faces toward the Hotel Victor, Weston is saying, within himself:

"What a find! I'll get the particulars and write to Stanhope."

THE END

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